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THE UNDERREPRESENTATION OF BLACK STUDENTS IN ADVANCED PLACEMENT  
CLASSES:  
A LOCAL RESPONSE TO A NATIONAL ISSUE

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Education

By  
Tia M. Wanzo

December 2014

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Tia M. Wanzo

2014

**Duquesne University**  
**School of Education**  
**Professional Doctorate in Educational Leadership**  
**Program**

***Dissertation***

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Education (Ed.D.)

***Presented by:***

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**August 18, 2014**

THE UNDERREPRESENTATION OF BLACK STUDENTS IN ADVANCED PLACEMENT  
CLASSES: A LOCAL RESPONSE TO A NATIONAL ISSUE

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# ABSTRACT

THE UNDERREPRESENTATION OF BLACK STUDENTS IN ADVANCED PLACEMENT

CLASSES:

A LOCAL RESPONSE TO A NATIONAL ISSUE

By

Tia Wanzo

December 2014

Dissertation supervised by Gretchen Generett

A pertinent educational issue in our country is the black and white achievement gap. One specific program that has been developed and implemented over the last several years in an effort to provide strong academic curriculum and raise student achievement, including minority student achievement, is the College Board's advanced placement (AP) Program. The AP Program courses are widely recognized as providing students with academically challenging curriculum, facilitating their acceptance to colleges and supporting their preparation for post-secondary education. The emphasis of this work relates to the concern that although the AP program has been in existence for decades and is a key part of most high schools' curriculum, there is an underrepresentation of Black students in Advanced Placement classes.

This work takes a brief look at the achievement gap and opportunity gap and describes how the common theme of course taking impacts the gaps. It discusses systematic barriers which lead to the inequities in advanced placement classes such as: Socioeconomic Status/Poverty School Structure/Policy, Teacher Training/Teacher Expectations, and Parental Involvement. In addition, it briefly describes the historical journey of intelligence, testing, and social theories. The framework used to address the problem is Networked Improvement Communities. Finally, light is shed on a school district currently working on this problem and a strategic plan is suggested in order to assist other schools, communities, or academies.

## DEDICATION

To the “undiscovered diamonds”: Your ability, resources, gifts, and talents are being untapped.  
It is my charge to continue this work in order for your light to shine. I dedicate this to you.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

-I would like to begin by thanking my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Without you, none of this would be possible. There were times when I did not know how I would complete this task. Whenever I felt like giving up, I found strength in your word. Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding: In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.

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# **Chapter 1**

## **The Problem**

### **The Underrepresentation of Black Students in Advanced Placement: A Local Response to a National Issue**

A lack of access to educational opportunities has been a reality for black students. As a result, America's schools are facing a dilemma, nationally. Black students are significantly underrepresented in Advanced Placement courses. In this work, I outline and discuss why this problem needs to be addressed. Finally, I identify areas of improvement using Network Improvement Communities. It is my desire that the agenda set forth in this work will assist other schools, academies, and communities to collaborate and improve their systems.

Educational researchers have long been concerned with the achievement gap that separates racial minorities and their peers. The achievement gap has been described as "the differences between the test scores of minority and/or low-income students and the test scores of their White and Asian peers" (NEA, 2014, p.1). In order to improve the learning environment and educational experiences for all students, we must begin looking at the achievement gap. In the 2006 Presidential address of the American Educational Research Association, Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) stated that the achievement gap is more than standardized tests scores, dropout rates and the relatively few students of color who take Advanced Placement examinations. Furthermore, she states that the achievement gap goes beyond the issue of who is admitted to colleges and graduate and professional programs. She argues that a focus on the gap is misplaced. Ladson-Billings argues that educators need to change the language of "gap" to "debt" because gap suggests that everyone started at the same place. Looking historically at how



Blacks were discriminated against and the subsequent impact of those injustices, Ladson-Billings argues that an “education debt” has accumulated over time. Naming the historical disparity as a gap gives us a short-range picture of how students perform. Ladson-Billings argues that the historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral decisions and policies that characterize our society have created an education debt that needs to be repaid-Advanced Placement classes fit into the debt conversation (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

“The Advanced Placement (AP) Program is a collaborative effort between secondary and postsecondary institutions that provides students opportunities to take freshman level courses while still in high school” (ETS, 2008, p. 7). In 1952, the Ford Foundation noticed that the brightest high school students were studying the same material as students in many entry-level college courses. As a result, the foundation developed the concept of advanced placement. The Ford Foundation began to produce an AP curriculum. In 1954, the College Board assumed control of the AP program. Strong evidence has recognized that an academically enriched high school experience enhances students’ ability to be college ready and later a college graduate.

Recent data show that Blacks are underrepresented in the AP program (ETS, 2008). “For an example while Black high school seniors comprised almost 14 percent of all public high school seniors, they comprise only about 7 percent of the AP examinee population.” (pg. 9). Also, Black students’ performance on AP tests still remains far below that of white students. Nationwide, the mean AP score for white students is 2.97; for Blacks it is 1.91. This means the average black score is a full letter grade below the average white scores (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2009). Increasing the number of students taking Advanced Placement classes

may cause an increase in the number of Black students passing AP exams and thus cause a decline in the education debt.

**Figure 1: The 10<sup>th</sup> Annual AP Report to the Nation (College Board, 2014)**

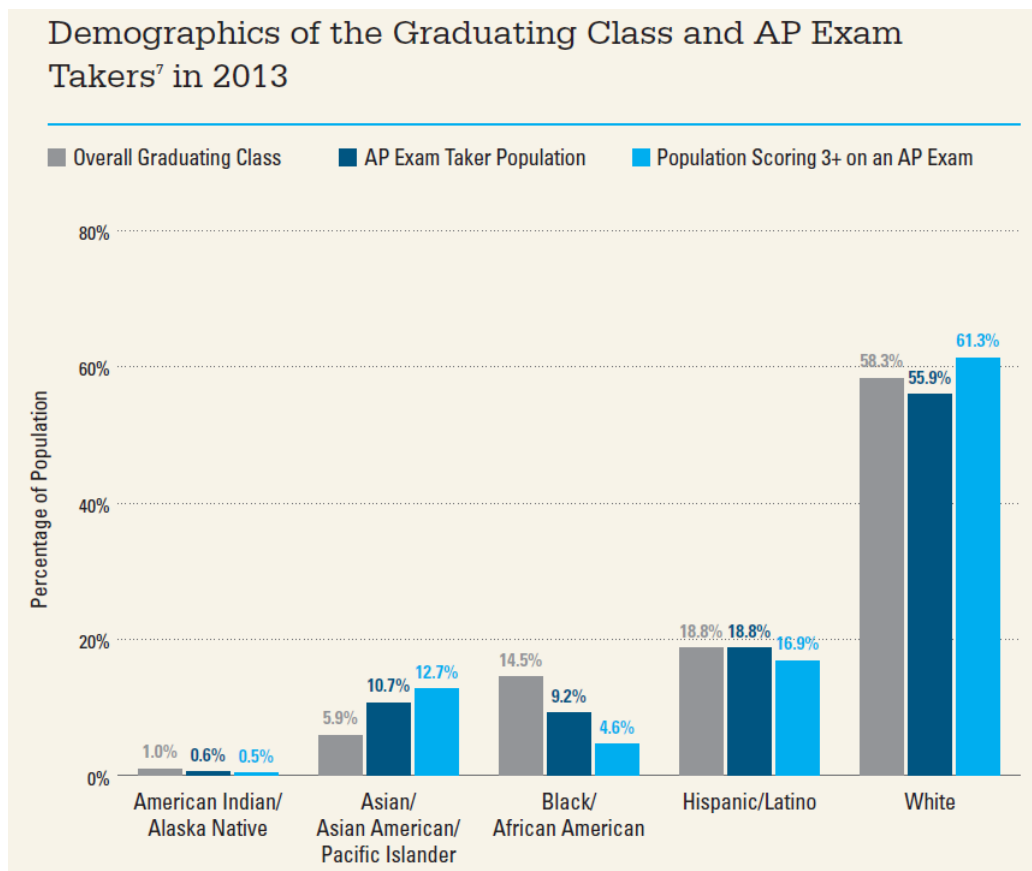


Figure 1 shows that Black/African American students in the graduating class of 2013 were the most underrepresented group in AP classrooms of successful AP Exam takers. According to the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual AP Report to the Nation (2014), 10,169 White graduates in the class of 2013 took an AP exam during high school compared to 843 Black/African American students in the class of 2013.

In order to properly understand how schools have gotten to the place where disparities are paramount, one must look to historical factors. In order to better understand the impact of those historical decisions, social theories are explored. Chapter 2 also delves into historical and sociological theories. Advanced Placement classes began in the early part of the twentieth century in order to address a widening gap between secondary and higher education. After World War II, Americans began to pay more attention to education focusing on educating gifted students. This led to the opening of a gifted school and the creation of an intelligence test to identify gifted students (Rothschild, 1999).

Educational systems are designed to have the behaviors of white students centered as the norm and for it to go unnoticed. White privilege describes the societal advantages afforded to Whites based solely on the color of their skin (Keleher & Johnson, 2001). Such privilege is historically embedded within laws, policies and procedures that systematically excluded people of color from basic human rights. As a result of white privilege and systematic racism, whites have always had greater access to money, property, social networks, and education than other groups. As a system, education was designed with the same racial inequities as other American systems. For example, the norms of schools are designed to advantage middle-class, white students. Cultural expressions by people of color, ranging from hair and clothing styles to language, behaviors, are often discouraged in these settings. All of these factors contribute to and maintain white privilege (Keleher & Johnson, 2001).

Chapter 3 introduces Mason High School <sup>1</sup> which is a case study for this work and is an example of the debt that is owed. Mason High is a representative case of other high schools in the country in that it also has an underrepresentation of Black students in the Advanced Placement classes. Currently, out of the 43% of black students at Mason High School, only 23% are taking Advanced Placement classes. A small group of teachers at Mason began researching this problem and found that over 50% of the Black students were eligible for the AP classes. The prior year, 17% of the Black students participated in AP classes. This work will seek to find possible root causes leading to the current statistics by looking closely at policies, processes, and procedures for enrollment into Advanced Placement courses and discussing whether or not they need to be changed.

Also in Chapter 3, the following social theories are discussed as the root of the problem of practice: *Acting white* is defined as speaking Standard English, getting good grades in school, being on time, working hard to get good grades, and spending time in the library (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986). Black students are often faced with the struggle of not wanting to be portrayed as “acting white” by their peers. Hence, they may decide not to take an AP class as an act of resistance to the privileges unjustly afforded to White students. In response to rejecting the notion of “acting white,” students may fall into a stereotype threat. *Stereotype threat* is defined as the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype or the fear of doing something which will confirm the stereotype (Steele, 1999). Research shows that Black students are often negatively stereotyped by their teachers (Landsdon, 2004). Steele argued that this barrier holds back the achievement of Blacks, women, and other underrepresented groups.

---

<sup>1</sup> Mason High is a pseudo name for the high school.

Participation in Advanced Placement courses is an example of how Black students may choose to opt-out rather than have to confront the stereotype.

*Expectancy Value Theory* suggests that an individual's expectancies for success and value they have for succeeding are important determinants of their motivation to perform different achievement tasks (Wingfield, 1994). A Black student may decide not to take an Advanced Placement course because within a racist and unjust system they have not seen the advantages (and the value) afforded them for taking such courses. Therefore, this is little incentive and motivation to do so. Research shows that students have better chances for success if their teachers have high expectations for them (Rhem, 1999). Most teachers are White and middle class which cause a challenge in how they relate to their Black students. Unfortunately, many teachers do not have the high expectations because they are not prepared in culturally relevant ways for students who are culturally different.

Each social theory listed above helps to better understand the root causes of the education debt and the small numbers of Black students taking AP classes. The issue is systematic. *Institutional racism* is defined as the differential access to the goods, services, and opportunities of society by race (Jones, 2000). The educational system, like the one where Mason High is located, is set up to discriminate against Black students having a *deficit perspective*, which is defined as viewing students who are from different racial and ethnic groups as culturally deprived or disadvantaged (Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Trotman, 2002). Schools have yet to successfully and routinely find the gifts and talents of students who are culturally different.

The Design for Action (chapter 4) is significant as it addresses the problem using the theory of improvement science. According to the Carnegie Foundation of the Advancement of Teaching, improvement science allows us to “cull and synthesize the best of what we know from

scholarship and practice, rapidly develop and test prospective improvements, deploy what we learn about what works in schools and classrooms, and add to our knowledge to continuously improve the performance of the system,” (p. 1). A Networked Improvement Community (NIC) (Langley, Moen, Nolan, Nolan, Norman & Provost, 2009) is suggested as a theoretical framework. It is a “distinct network that arranges human and technical resources so that the community is capable of “getting better at getting better,” (Englebart, 2003). Networked Improvement Communities have been successful in other institutions such as community colleges and hospitals (Bryk, Gomez, & Grunow, 2010). I am suggesting this framework because it is a problem-centered approach that combines academic research, clinical practice, and commercial expertise (p. 3). It is unique because it engages stakeholders such as students, teachers, community members (students, parents, churches, after school programs, diversity committee, and representatives from the teacher’s union, administrators, and members of the academy.) This is how the work becomes networked. Anthony Bryk (2014) offered the six core principles for Networked Improvement Communities:

1. Make the work problem-specific and user centered;
2. Variation in performance is the core problem to address;
3. See the System that produces the current outcomes;
4. We cannot improve at scale what we cannot measure;
5. Anchor practice improvement in disciplined inquiry; and
6. Accelerate improvements through networked communities

The NIC is further explained in Chapter 4 and a case study looks closely at Mason High where efforts were made through a grant to intentionally address the problem of practice.

The potential generative impacts of addressing the problem are described in chapter 5. Generative impacts suggests that “the work will be engaged by others, tested with others, and through the collective efforts, be improved in the field” (ProDEL, 2011). If the work is generative, other members of the school, academy, or community could learn from the work and ultimately, use it in their context. In this final chapter, ways in which the work will continue is portrayed.

In this work, I will explain how I led others in an effort to (1) understand a problem of practice, (2) address that problem as they understood it, and (3) the efforts that others are continuing. The problem has to be understood before it is addressed.

## Chapter 2

### **An Examination of the Problem of Practice**

Black students who have the potential to be successful in Honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses are systematically and structurally excluded from access to advanced classes that would better prepare them for success in college and in future careers. By having more students participate in Advanced Placement (AP) classes, the achievement debt will begin to be repaid.

**Black students in Advanced Placement Classes.** There has been a history of underrepresentation of students of color and those in a poverty context in advanced placement classes. While the population in schools in the United States is becoming increasingly more culturally and economically diverse, the population in Honors and Advanced Placement (AP) programs is remaining almost static. Composed of predominately white, middle to upper class students, Honors and AP class populations are underrepresented by students from minority populations and from low socioeconomic (SES) levels (Ndura, Robinson, & Ochs, 2003). The *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) stresses that all children must receive the best possible education, but this is not always the case given the barriers in Honors and AP classes. Students from low-income backgrounds and students of color (African Americans and Latino students) are consistently left out of classes for the gifted and talented or advanced. (Johnson & Kritsonis, 2006). According the College Board's "Advanced Placement Report to the Nation," black high school students are significantly underrepresented in AP courses that provide them with a jumpstart to college. In 2006, blacks comprised 6.9 percent of AP classes but 13.7 percent of the overall student population (Hays, 2007). Hays continues by saying that blacks are not encouraged to take AP classes or simply do not qualify due to disparities in curriculum updates,



teacher training, student academic preparation, and local and federal funding. Trevor Packer, executive director of the AP program for The College Board, says the racial gap in AP stems from systemic problems that must be fixed beginning at the elementary and middle school level (Hays, 2007). Similarly,

According to Harvard's Civil Rights Project (2004), African American students are half as likely as whites to be placed in Honors or Advanced Placement (AP) English or Math classes and 2.4 more likely than whites to be placed in remedial classes. Even when African American students demonstrate equal ability with their white counterparts, they are less likely to be placed in accelerated classes. Students who take AP courses in high school are eligible to take the corresponding AP examination and may earn college credit for scores above a minimum threshold. Given the importance of being academically prepared for college coursework, many African American students have not been exposed to the curriculum necessary for them to be successful in college. (Singleton, Livingston, Hines & Jones, 2008, p. 14)

In the *AP Report to the Nation* (College Board, 2012), statistics show that 80% of black students who have potential to succeed in an AP course do not take the recommended AP subject. This is followed closely by underrepresentation of 73.7% of Native American students, 70.4% of Hispanic students, and even 61.6% of white students (p.17). According to Collegeboard.com, the 2012 statistics of students in Advanced Placement classes revealed black students falling behind their white peers in all areas. Overall student population: black-14.5%, white 58.5%, AP Exam Taker Participation: black-9.2%, white-56.4%, and population scoring 3 or higher on exam: black-4.4%, white-61.9%.

In 2013, the Obama administration struck a deal with the public school system in Opelika, Alabama to enroll more black students in Advanced Placement classes (Ed.gov, 2013). The Education Department's Office of Civil Rights Act launched its investigation under the *Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964*. Predominantly white schools in the district offered a greater number of advanced courses in a wide variety of subjects, the predominately black high schools had "significantly fewer" advanced courses, and AP courses were offered only online. Under the agreement, the district agreed to:

Develop a district-wide plan for addressing the under-representation of African American students in AP and higher level courses;

Identify any barriers to African American students' participation in AP and higher level courses; Permit students to participate in distance learning opportunities at schools providing more AP and higher-level options;

Establish dual-enrollment courses with the local community college for students at the predominantly African American high schools and provide transportation for all students who elect to take dual-enrollment courses; and

Encourage students at all of the district's elementary, middle, and high schools to aspire to attend college, and to participate in AP and higher level courses

How did we get to this point in education?

**The History of the Achievement Gap.** Despite a long-running focus on closing gaps in academic achievement among American students, by race/ethnicity, and by socioeconomic status, they remain wide and persistent. In order to improve the learning environment and

educational experiences for all students, we must begin by looking at the achievement gap. The achievement gap has been described as “the differences between the test scores of minority and/or low-income students and the test scores of their White and Asian peers” (NEA, 2014, p.1). Educational researchers have long been concerned with the achievement gap that separates minorities and their peers leading to talent being untapped and unused. In 1950, the Educational Policies Commission discussed the waste of Black talent (Singleton, Livingston, Hines & Jones, 2008):

Lacking both incentive and opportunity, the probabilities are very great that, however superior one's gifts may be, he will rarely live a life of high achievement. Follow-up studies of highly gifted young Negroes, for instance, reveal a shocking waste that adds an incalculable amount to the price of prejudice in this country. (p. 52)

In other words, the gifts and talents of young, gifted Black students were being wasted due to the racism of the 1950's. They were not receiving the same incentives and opportunities as their white classmates. Unfortunately, our current systems continues to lead to the same loss of gifts and talents.

The gap between blacks and whites and the gap between Hispanics and whites narrowed between 1970 and 1988, decreasing by almost 50% (Haycock, 2001). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the gap widened significantly in the 1990's, and continues to increase each year. There have been many strategies implemented to close the achievement gap between black and white students. States and school districts have devoted their efforts and energy into the earliest grades such as preschool and kindergarten. Also, school districts have focused on providing high quality teachers and an aligned curriculum (Reardon & Bischoff, 2011). One study found that, one-third of the achievement gap in mathematics was due

to course-taking differences (Secada, 1992). This thought brings us back to the problem. Could the achievement gap be narrowed if underrepresented students had more opportunities in taking Advanced Placement classes?

In the 2006 Presidential address of the American Educational Research Association, Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) speaks about the achievement gap going beyond standardized tests scores and existing also in dropout rates and relative numbers of students who take advanced placement examinations; enroll in honors, advanced placement, and “gifted” classes and are admitted to colleges and graduate and professional programs. Ladson-Billings describes a variety of explanations for the existence for which has been studied through the years. She states that the term “racial achievement gap” unfairly constructs students as lacking and suggests the students need to catch up. The “catch up” idea neglects to consider historical and sociological impacts on access and opportunity, which will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

Nationally, the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) report also revealed that white students had higher scores than black students, on average, on all assessments. While the nationwide gaps in 2007 were narrower than in previous assessments at both grades 4 and 8 in mathematics and in grade 4 reading, white students had average scores at least 26 points higher than black students in each subject, on a 0-500 scale (NAEP, 2010). NAEP reports that 89% of black eighth graders read below grade level, compared to 53% of white eighth graders. At the state level, gaps in grade 4 mathematics existed in 2007 in the 46 states for which results were available. Also at the state level, gaps in grade 4 reading existed in 2007 in 44 states for which results were available. Data in 2009 and 2011 showed that black and Hispanic students were behind their white peers by an average of more than 20 test-score

points on the NAEP math and reading assessment at 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, a difference of about two grade levels (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2011, p. 1). Yet the *Achievement Gap Initiative* at Harvard University reported “virtually no racial or social class differences in mental ability among infants before their first birthday and a few social class indicators able to explain the small differences that do exist ” (The Presidents and Fellows of Harvard College, 2014, p. 1).

***Socioeconomic Status/Poverty.*** Economics is a key indicator of the achievement gap. Children in poverty have smaller vocabularies and lower language skills than children in middle-income families (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2011). Also according to the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, dropout rates tend to be higher for children living in poverty. In 2009, there was an enormous wealth gap between white households and households of color. The median wealth of white households was \$113,149 compared with \$6,235 for Latino families and \$5,677 for Black families (Shapiro, Meschede, & Osoro, 2013). Economic disparities lead to an education debt.

Socioeconomic status (SES) is often measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation. It is conceptualized as the social standing or class of an individual or group. Many theorists have studied how poverty affects academic performance (Payne, 2001; Jensen, 2009). Poverty is also a barrier which impacts the educational experience of a black student. For example, students from a poverty context are more likely to give up on something when it becomes challenging. This process is called learned helplessness (Jensen, 2009). Jensen argues that many children raised in poverty enter school a step behind their peers and also have greater incidences of health issues. The health issues led to school absences, tardiness, and incidents of

illnesses during class. These factors also contribute fluctuating emotional and behavioral issues. Children from poverty context are also more like to experience violence in their neighborhoods. Experts in the field listed the following factors listed above as barriers in the identification of CLD (culturally and linguistically diverse) students for the gifted and/or talented programs: (National Education Association, 2007).

**Table 1: Factors Causing Barriers for CLD Students (National Education Association, 2007)**

Lack of information about the availability of social and health care services in the school and community
Different gender-role customs and behaviors
Preferred learning styles, e.g. primarily listening (verbal) or through physically interacting with learning material
Less opportunity for early exposure to school-related academic or curricular experiences
Limited parental involvement in school activities
Lack of access to academically successful role models
Lack of resources for extra-curricular enrichment activities
Stereotypic or lower expectations of teachers and family
Lack of culturally responsive assessments
Rigid or inappropriate eligibility criteria that are responsive to cultural and ethnic differences

Klopfenstein (2003) discovered in her study that socio-economic disparities was the single most important factor in explaining the difference between white and black factor in explaining the difference between white and black enrollment in AP courses. Low-income students were more likely to be pressured to work or take on family responsibilities while attending school, and they typically had limited access to the culture of power that fosters a sense of purpose in students who pursue a rigorous high school curriculum. Her study revealed that a low income status limited AP participation for all races. Black and Latino students were three times more likely to be low-income as white students (Klopfenstein, 2003).

Students may fear the workload required in AP classes. A few years ago, the theme at a local high school was rigor, relevance and relationship. In an AP class, rigor does not mean adding more work, reading more novels, or researching more topics. Another problem is having the student remain in the AP class once they begin. Ladsman (2004) writes:

Students in one St. Paul, Minnesota, high school talked about a teacher who asked the white kids in an advanced placement class the tough questions but turned to the few black and Latino students when she had an easy question that “anyone could answer.” When confronted with this situation, the teacher was stunned. She realized it was true and admitted, “I just assumed you didn’t know the answers, and I didn’t want to embarrass you.” (p. 29)

We must also be willing to address race when looking at socioeconomic status. When superintendent, Jerry Weast, began attempting to make improvements in the Montgomery County Public School System, he was not afraid to talk explicitly about race and ethnicity. Dr. Weast is white. A black educator summed it up in this way:

“What made it different for Dr. Weast was that he was ‘one of them.’ It was like a family member saying we have a problem within our family” (Childress, Doyle, & Thomas, 2009, p. 27).

This was a statement from a white teacher in Montgomery County (Childress, Doyle, & Thomas, 2009):

I think the central issue is that we don’t want to talk about race. Most of us as white, mainstream Americans have been taught to be colorblind. So we assume everybody’s like us. And when we put interventions in place for a student of color based on our own white, middle- class perspectives, and the intervention doesn’t work, we then unconsciously or sometimes consciously say, “Well, see, we did this fabulous intervention and it didn’t work. It must be the kids.” It’s not done in a malicious or intentional way, but it happens in classrooms every day. This is very difficult work because teachers tend to deny, defend, or shut down when you bring up issues of race. They’ve chosen this profession because they want to help children, but what is not understood is that despite good intention, our teaching practices don’t always have positive impact on the student. (p. 115)

Debra Viadero (2000) offered several factors leading to the achievement gap. Factors include: growing up poor, academic coursework peer pressure, high mobility, teacher quality, teacher expectations, parenting or parental involvement, preschool, and the “Summer Effect” which is students from low income families tend to lose ground academically over the summer. Wealthier students tend to be more likely to attend summer camps, visit libraries, or take vacations. Each factor directly effects student achievement.



***Parental Involvement.*** Research shows that students whose parents are involved in their educational experience do better academically. Nonetheless, black parents or low income parents many not feel welcomed in their child's school. The experience barriers when attempting to engage schools.

An investigation on Chicago school reform found similar characteristics of schools where disadvantaged students improved: well-developed and aligned curricula, good teacher-principal collaboration, and concerted efforts to involve parents (Rothstein, 2013). Students who experience parental absence can pose a problem for educators. Nevertheless it should not be assumed that poverty, disorganized families, or lack of resources equal poor performance. In fact, children from low-income communities can be very resilient. They may receive their support from other places such as faith-based communities. Therefore, it is the task of the educators and administrators to partner with the community stakeholders as well (Singleton, Livingston, Hines & Jones, 2008).

Parents and community members of black students may not be aware of the benefits of and identification process for Advanced Placement classes. A parent also has the ability to request that their child be placed in an Advanced Placement class. A study which investigated the impact of ethnic and economic background, as well as parents' educational/professional level on students' enrollment in AP classes found parents to be the most influential in encouraging them to take AP classes followed by teachers, counselors, and friends (Ndura, Robinson, & Ochs, 2003). Many parents are not aware of their ability to make the request. Teachers should be in communication with parents. The school district can provide trainings for this information. The trainings could inform the parents with information on Advanced Placement classes, the

benefits of having their child in the classes, and the process of enrolling their child in an Advanced Placement class.

Studies have discovered neither parents nor students were fully aware of the process of enrollment in advanced placement courses. There has also been a discussion of the difference of advocacy with white students and parents and students and black parents (Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008). White parents would advocate for their students to receive waivers for advanced placement classes not recommended by teachers. A study conducted by Taliaferro and DeCuir-Gunby (2008) found that almost all Black parents were not aware of the opportunities to advocate for their children.

Yet, if a parent does not advocate for their child, someone else needs to. Who becomes the voice? Is it a teacher, guidance counselor, or principal? As an ethical leader, I cannot rely solely on the parent especially when I see the parents usually doing the advocating are those of the white students. Therefore, there has to be other ways to identify. Ultimately, we do want the parents to give their input. They just need the tools necessary for identification. An effort should be made in the community by partnering the school district with parents and community members in order to recruit students of for AP classes. The school district and community groups should work together for this cause. By using local churches and community organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club and a local community center, schools can partner with the school districts.

There have been many studies on the impact of parental involvement on the academic achievement of students. Research defines parental involvement in terms of involvement in school and involvement at home (Epstein, 1995). Black parents are often not involved in their

children's schooling. However, black parents often spend more time on being involved at home rather than at school. Because of this, the parents are not always informed about problems in schools, including black students' access to AP programs (Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008).

The Department of Education called attention to the achievement gap by focusing on student's college enrollment and success rates. The goal of this focus is to position the United States so that the country will lead the world in college graduates in 2020. As of 2008, 38 percent of all Americans age 25-34 had earned at least an associate degree. Only 26 percent of blacks ages 25-37 obtained a two-year degree, according to the American Council of Education's 24<sup>th</sup> annual status report on minorities in higher education (Education Week, 2011).

Nationally and locally, the passing of *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 has caused public schools to become more accountable to the disparate. The accountability has centered around performances between White and Black students on standardized tests (Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008). The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) is an example of one of those tests. Although the gap "exists when we compare dropout rates and relative numbers of students who take advanced placement examinations; enroll in honors, advanced placement, and "gifted" classes; and are admitted to colleges and graduate and professional programs," (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 4). The pattern of high school drop out rates shows that the black dropout rate has 1.5 times higher than the white dropout out rate over the last three decades (Lee, 2002).

"Although the performance on standardized tests during the early years is important, other disparities within the education milieu need to be addressed" (Taliaferro and DeCuir-Gunby, 2008, p. 167). The achievement gap is one example of a disparity in the education

milieu. Another disparity involves an opportunity gap. In many educational systems, Black students are not given the same opportunities as their peers leading to another factor increasing the education debt.

**Opportunity Matters.** The National Council of Churches Committee on Public Education and Literacy defines the opportunity gaps as “the differences in resources that society provides for children and schools from place to place” (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2009, p.1). The council also states that “despite more than 30 years of lawsuits in more than 40 states and the improved funding they have brought, inequity in funding for public education between wealthy and poor school districts remains 3:1 in most states” (p.1).

There is data to support this. For example, a survey conducted by the *National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future*, found inequitable school conditions reported by teachers in California, Wisconsin, and New York. According to the study,

The evidence cited by the teachers, school by school, proves beyond any shadow of a doubt that children at risk, who come from families with poorer economic backgrounds, are not being given an opportunity to learn that is equal to that offered to children from the most privileged families. The obvious cause of this inequality lies in the finding that the most disadvantaged children attend schools that do not have basic facilities and conditions conducive to providing them with a quality education. Without such facilities and conditions, both the teachers and the students will be hard-put to achieve any semblance of quality education. (Carroll, Fulton, Abercrombie, & Yoon, 2004, p. 7)

The teachers surveyed revealed unconscionable problems within schools identified as high-risk. They include: Teachers without credentials, insufficient number of qualified teachers to prepare for high-stakes tests, high turnover rates, vacancies left unfilled or filled with substitute teachers, inadequate efforts to involve parents, physical facilities rated lower (cockroaches, mice, and rats reported), inadequate books and teaching materials, out of date computers and technology, and teachers using their own money to provide materials for the students (Carroll, Fulton, Abercrombie, & Yoon, 2004).

These systematic and site-based problems negatively impact instruction. When dealing with such harsh situations, it may be difficult for students to focus on taking more challenging courses. Oftentimes, in a “high risk” school, Advanced Placement classes may not be an option due to funding and staffing issues. As a result, black students are not receiving the same opportunities as their white peers.

In order to better understand the overall impact of the opportunity gap faced by Black students, it is broken down into three elements: the expectations gap, the relationships gap, and the participation gap (Quaglia, Fox, & Corso, 2010). The expectations gap suggests that students are aware of the stereotypical views teachers hold about them. It also suggests that these views negatively impact the students’ ability to perform academically. Subsequently, it is difficult for students to attend advanced classes let alone envision themselves being successful in them if they believe their teachers expect them to fail. The relationships gap definition puts forth the notion that teachers’ ability to care for students and be in a relationship with them matters and is directly linked to the effort students put forth in class. Research shows that the relationships students have with teachers is one of the best predictors of hard work and engagement in school (Osterman, 2000). In essence, students will work harder for teachers who they believe “care”

about them. The participation gap refers to the opportunity and advantage between those students who are actively engaged in their classes and school culture and those who are not. The gap also refers to how inviting and welcoming the school is for students.

According to the College Board in 2006, there is an opportunity gap in the area of Advanced Placement class access. Taliaferro and DeCuir-Gunby outline the opportunity gap disparity as occurring because black students are less likely to be nominated by white teachers for advanced classes. This is a concern because white, female teachers are the vast majority in the teaching profession. Teachers' attitudes and stereotypical misperceptions towards black students influence fewer referrals. The focus on deficits makes the recognition of strengths difficult for minority students (Frasier, Garcia, & Passow, 1995). Unfortunately, the few black students enrolled in advanced placement classes feel further alienated because they are not represented in the curriculum and are often one of few black students in the class (Ford, 2006).

In the *Lost Opportunity* report, the Schott Foundation for Public Education identifies four core minimum resources that are necessary if a child-regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status-is to have a fair and substantive opportunity to learn. They include-highly qualified early childhood education, highly qualified teachers and instructors in grades K-12, college preparatory curricula that will prepare all youth for college, work, and community, and equitable instructional resources (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2009).

If a student does not receive a highly qualified early childhood education, then the educational debt begins to incur as opposed to being paid off. The same is true if that student does not have highly qualified teachers and equitable instructional resources, they fall behind their peers. Not paying towards the debt means that by the time college is in sight that students

will have limited academic resources banked towards higher education. The end result of not having core minimum resources is an increased achievement education debt for black students and those in a poverty context.

These core resources are similar to those stated as lacking in the *National Commission on Teaching and America's Future* report (2004) which was mentioned above.

The following figures show a report which looked at the opportunity gap from state to state. The figures will be the Opportunity for Disadvantaged Students compared to white, non-Latino students, Social and Civic Consequences of the Opportunity Gap, and Economic Consequences of the Opportunity Gap.

In the 2001 report, *The National Commission on the High School Year* stated the need for high schools to offer challenging alternatives for students. The report further explained that while 70% of high school graduates go to some form of post secondary education, only one half who enroll in a 4-year institution will leave with a degree. The main reason was because students were not prepared for the rigors of college academics in high school. Students who participate in rigorous classes are more prepared for post-secondary education (Ndura, Robinson, and Ochs, 2003). One study found that students taking an AP course had a dramatic effect on students' chance of persisting even when students fail the end-of course AP test. The more of these courses a student took, the higher their persistence rates were (Klepfer, & Hull, 2012).

By looking at the achievement debt and the opportunity gap, researchers have found similar concerns with how they impact students. The fact that we have such disparities is not a coincidence. The sociological barriers can be traced to the ways in which tests and testing was designed in America.

## **Historical Barriers to Access and Opportunities**

The country was founded on disparities that resigned Blacks to secondary status such as the *Jim Crow Laws*. Court cases such as, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, also resigned blacks to a secondary status. In 1892, an African American man named Homer Plessy refused to give his seat to a white man on the train in New Orleans. He was arrested. Homer used the fourteenth amendment to fight his arrest. The case made it to the Supreme Court but Plessy did not win.

See Appendix A lists key figures in Education, Psychology, Sociology, and Anthropology who shaped how we currently view intelligence.

One such scientist, Lewis Terman, suggested that heredity determined intellect. His tests results proved that: “the intelligence of the average negro is vastly inferior to that of the average white man” (Srinivas, 2012, p. 20). Despite the fact that the impact was profound. His work was later challenged. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2012) writes:

“Clearly no African American or Latino children were thought worthy for Terman’s work. We do not discredit his sampling techniques despite his exclusion of entire groups of eligible subjects. Instead, we have used Terman’s work as the basis for “gifted and talented” programs throughout the nation.” (p. 116)

Ladson-Billings statement shows that, based on his racist value system, Terman was predisposed to believe that Blacks were inherently inferior. His unscientific methods confirmed his white supremacist thoughts and ultimately assisted in creating a system designed to produce outcomes that would position Black learners as inferior for generations to come.

In 1901 Worcester, Massachusetts opened the first school for gifted children. At this time, we were three years removed from the Civil War and most northern schools were still



segregated (Harmon, 2004). Therefore, blacks were not represented. As early as 1901, the parents of white children were able to enjoy the benefits of sending their children to newer, neighborhood schools while the parents of black children had to send their children to segregated schools, many of which were not located close to where they lived (Delinder, 2004). In 1916, The Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale (Nash, 1987) was established. It is an individually administered intelligence test. Originally, the test was used to determine which children needed extra help in school, but later it was used as a way to separate people into groups based on intelligence. Later became a way to keep groups separated based on their “intelligence” level. Also in 1916, a new psychology was introduced based upon the construct of individual differences with of focus on heredity and behavior (Harmon, 2004). There were studies conducted comparing the differences between blacks and whites. This led to the “mulatto hypothesis” (Herskovits, 1934) which suggested lighter skinned black children were more intelligent than dark-skinned black children. Children were labeled by the shade of their skin. In 1920, the army developed the National Intelligence Tests (NIT) to assess intellect of soldiers (Borland, 2004). The Stanford-Binet was revised in 1937 and again in 1960. In 1954, The National Association of Gifted Children is founded under the leadership of Ann Isaacs (Nash, 1987).

***Brown v. The Board of Education*** ended “separate but equal education” in 1954. The United States Supreme Court unanimously made a ruling that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal” in the Brown V. Board of Education of Topeka case. The plaintiff, Oliver Brown, was the parent of one of the children denied access to Topeka’s white schools. The decision opened the floodgates of school desegregation suits in the North and the South (Delinder, 2004). Through the Brown case, the court concluded that separating children on the

basis of race creates dangerous inferiority complexes that may adversely affect black children's ability to learn. (Reed, 1995). How far have we come from the Brown case? Many believe the struggle for equal educational opportunity has yet to be achieved. (Weinstein, Gregory, & Strambler, 2004.)

The tragic reality is that schools are more racially segregated and more unequal now than they were prior to *Brown*. This fact remains: African American children, among other children, still face an unequal opportunity to learn.

An African American student is 3 times more likely than a White student to be placed in special education, 3.2 times less likely to be placed in gifted class, and twice as likely to be corporally punished or suspended. (Weinstein, Gregory, & Strambler, 2004, p. 512)

Unfortunately, we continue to see issues of access and opportunity for black students after *Brown*. The ruling often caused Black families to be left with inadequate schools.

Prior to 1954, Topeka, Kansas, maintained half-empty classrooms in segregated schools in order to keep the races separate. After *Brown*, this pattern continued with racism disguised as "freedom of choice"- justifying building new schools in outlying areas as merely a response to the population shift to new subdivisions rapidly built in the western areas of the city (which turned out to be predominately white and upper class). Left behind were the less affluent, primarily black, residents who had little choice but to send their children to outdated and increasingly inferior schools. (Delinder, 2004, p. 2)

Broad, vague guidelines led to schools being closed in the south and public education suspended in many locations. Some states imposed sanctions on anyone who implemented desegregation (Delinder, 2004). From 1955 to 1960, federal judges would hear more than 200 school desegregation cases. Border states reached 70 percent integration within about two years. Southern states, from grade to graduate school, were hardly changed (Willough, 2004, p. 4). Although the ruling declared racial segregation unconstitutional, it did not give specifics about how this would be done. There, blacks faced many hardships after the ruling.

- “In 1956, Autherine Lucy, a black woman seeking admission to the University of Alabama, was called vile names and pelted with rotten eggs by angry whites. Officials excluded her from campus, and then expelled her. The university remained all white until the early 1960s.
- In 1957, bloody riots erupted as nine black students attempted to enter Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. President Eisenhower, a reluctant player in the extended battle, eventually surrounded the school with 1,100 soldiers from the U.S. Army and the Arkansas National Guard. Troops stayed all year.
- In 1960 in New Orleans, armed marshals shielded 6-year-old Ruby Bridges as she passed an angry crowd of 150 whites who threw tomatoes and eggs.
- And by 1964 in Prince Edward County, Virginia — a full decade after *Brown* — not a single black child had been admitted to a white school. In fact, the county defiantly closed its public schools for five years rather than integrate them.”

In Topeka, Kansas real estate developers urged people to buy new homes in areas in racially homogeneous suburbs. The result was newer schools being built in the new developments and

the ratios were disproportionately white. Also, there were segregated areas in public places other than the schools (Wilough, 2004).

In 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik (Valencia & Suzuki, 2001). Advancements in science caused the United States to examine the quality of American schooling particularly in math and science. Money was poured into identifying the brightest and talented students who would benefit from advanced math, science, and technology (Nash, 1987). In 1964, the Civil Right Act passes, emphasizing equal opportunities including those in education.

Despite the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments, African Americans were treated unfairly in many parts of the country, mainly in the south ([www.uscourts.gov](http://www.uscourts.gov)). Some states enacted laws which led to legally mandated segregation of the races. The laws of many states declared that blacks and whites could not use the same public facilities, ride the same buses, attend the same schools, etc. As mentioned above, these laws were known as the Jim Crow Laws. Black students were given an education which did not have the same quality as that of their White peers. As mentioned above, they were viewed as less intelligent and many wanted for them to be kept separate.

Seventy years after the first intelligence tests were developed; they were normed on a population that included people of color (Brennan, 2003). In the 1970's, Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and African Americans fought against the use of intelligence tests for placing students in special education. Also in 1972, The Marland Report-the first formal definition of giftedness is issued encouraging schools to define it broadly. The way that schools define "giftedness" is a very important factor. Also, the schools were given the authority to give a broad definition. Therefore, what educational leaders value may differ at one school compared

to another school. Hence, the gifts and talents of black students may not have been valued and included in the definition of giftedness in a school (Valencia & Suzuki, 2001).

In the 1980's, there was a concern about cultural bias against minority students. Minority students were at a disadvantage because of the tests items which pertained to which middle-class experiences (Nash, 1987). In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* scores of America's brightest students and their failure to compete with international counterparts. The report suggested raising academic standards and promoting appropriate curriculum for gifted learners. The curriculum of a gifted program has also been a concern for me through the years. The requirements are vague which leaves school districts the liberty to often set their own standards. As a result, the curriculum often varies from one school to the next. Also, the accountability is often invisible because the gifted students are usually not the priority especially in low performing schools. In 1988, Congress passes the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act (Valencia & Suzuki, 2001).

In the 1994, authors Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray wrote *The Bell Curve*. They argued that human intelligence is influenced by inherited and environmental factors. This is similar to Terman's belief of heredity determining intellect. They also wrote about IQ differences being genetic and that blacks had lower IQ's than whites. The book also suggested that the "cognitive elite", a group which was both highly intelligent and wealthy, could emerge among whites if they separated from the rest of society (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994). In 2002, The *No Child Left Behind Act* is passed. One of the benefits of The *No Child Left Behind Act* was the ability for educational leaders to see the achievement gap between White and students of color. Yet, as educators fought to make AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) there was not much of

a focus on the underrepresentation of Black students in Advanced Placement classes. The definition of gifted and talented students is modified to support multiple notions of intelligence, not all of which is intellect (Sternberg & Davidson, 1986). Once again, it is imperative to have a definition which accepts the gifts and talents of all students such as skills in visual or performing arts. In school districts where students of color were well represented in programs for the gifted, creativity and leadership were good predictors of selection (Grantham, Ford, Henfield, Scott, Harmon, Porcher, & Price, 2011). These school districts relied on factors other than intelligence tests scores. As a result, the gifts and talents students of color were able to be identified.

In a study conducted by Yoon and Gentry (2006), the *Civil Rights Data Collection* of the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) found that in gifted programs nationwide, Hispanic and black students have been continuously underrepresented in the gifted population since 1978. Specific state data also showed that in 2006, Hispanic students were underrepresented in 43 of the 50 states, and black students were underrepresented in 42 of the 50 states. This can be directly compared to the data from the same study that showed that white students were overrepresented in 26 of the 50 states, thereby documenting the discrepancy of the inclusion of students from diverse ethnic backgrounds in gifted programs (p. 125-128).

**Figure 2: National Summary to Learn for Disadvantaged Students (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2009)**

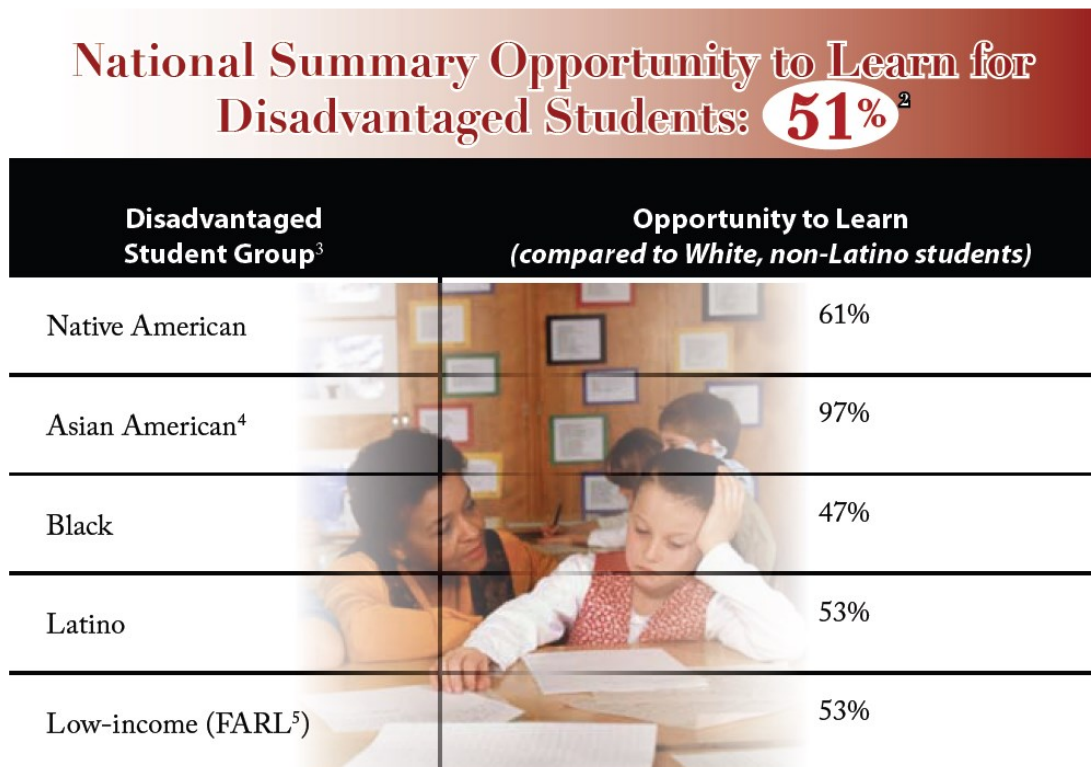


Figure 2 shows Native American, Black, and Latino students, a little over half on an Opportunity to Learn in the nation's best performing schools as the nation's white, non-Latino students.

**Figure 3: Drop out Factories (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2009)**

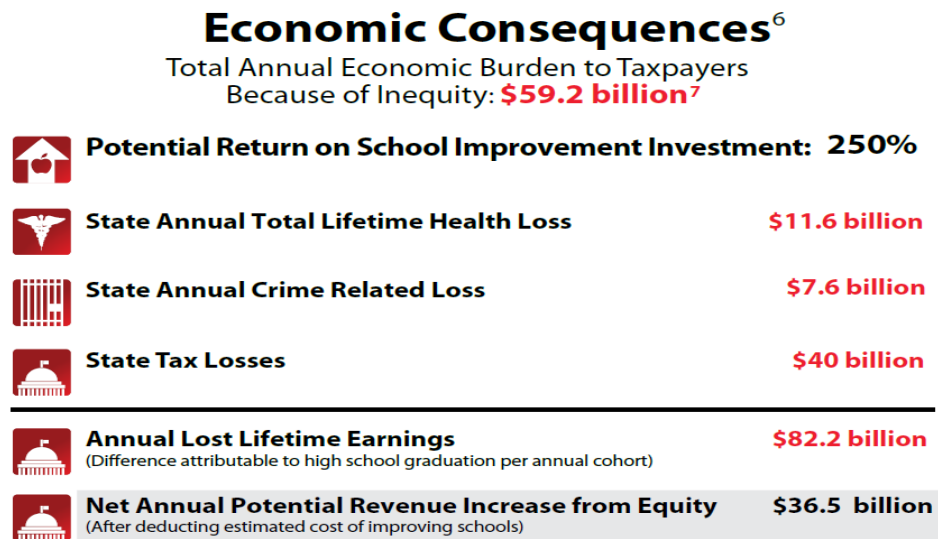
Group	Comparative Disadvantage*
Native American students	210%
Asian American students**	140%
Black, non-Latino students	280%
Latino students	230%
Low-income students (who may be in any racial/ethnic group)	230%
Comparison is to all White, non-Latino students	100%

Figure 3 divides the percentages of Native American, Asian American, Black, Latino, and low-income students in what are called “drop out factories” schools where most students do not graduate by the percentage of white, non-Latino students in those schools gives us the comparative disadvantage of each group. \*Higher numbers are worse.

The study also found that the gaps did not only effect educational institutions and secondary and post-secondary graduation rates. It ultimately causes economic consequences to society as a whole. For an example, the opportunity gap leads to students dropping out of school which then determines the job opportunities for a person.



Figure 4: Economic Consequences (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2009)



Finally, if we begin making adjustments to provide all students with the resources and educational methods, such as Advanced Placement enrollments, students will be positively impacted. According to the “Lost Opportunity” Report, our society would benefit by producing young adults who will be assets to their communities.

**Figure 5: Social and Civic Consequences (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2009)**



Researchers of the achievement gap, opportunity gap, and education debt refer to course taking as an area leading to the widening of the gap. Advanced Placement classes are examples of courses given as an option to high school students. (Ndura, Robinson, & Ochs, 2003; Secada, 1992.)

## **The Advanced Placement Journey**

**History of Advanced Placement.** According to collegeboard.com, Advanced Placement classes began in the early part of the twentieth century in an effort to close the widening gap between secondary and higher education. The goal was to allow high school students the opportunity to do college level work and to prepare for college. The courses gave students a chance to demonstrate college aptitude, gain leverage in college admissions, and give students an advantage on college curricula (Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008).

After World War II, Americans wanted this trend to be reversed. The Ford Foundation created the Fund for the Advancement of Education. The studies led to educators recommending that secondary schools and colleges work together to avoid repetition in course work at high school and college levels. Also, research demonstrated a need to allow motivated students to work at the height of their capabilities and advance as quickly as possible (Rothschild, 1999).

One study was conducted by educators from three prep schools-Andover, Exeter, and Lawrenceville-and three of the country's most prestigious colleges-Harvard, Princeton, and Yale. The study resulted in urgency for schools and colleges to see themselves as two halves of a common enterprise. Also, the report recommended secondary schools recruit imaginative teachers, that they encourage high schools seniors to engage in independent study and college-

level work and exams would be used to allow students to enter college with advanced standing. The study pulled its sample population from elite, white private schools. By doing this, the study effectively left out the vast majority of U.S. school students considering that at the time over 90% of them attended public schools (College Entrance Examination Board, 2003).

The second study by the Committee on Admission with Advanced Standing created a plan for developing college-level curriculum and standards which could be instituted at the high school level. The Committee also recruited leaders in every discipline level to develop courses and assessments that colleges would find rigorous enough to grant college credit. The first program was launched with 11 initial Advanced Placement subjects. In the 1955-56 school year, the program was under way and College Board stepped in to administer the program. At that time, it was name College Board Advanced Placement Program. This was also the time of the Civil Rights movement. While the College Board Advanced Placement Program was being created, Black people were fighting to have equal rights (College Entrance Examination Board, 2003). Blacks were still forced to use separate public utilities and schools; they suffered routine discrimination in employment and housing, as well as abuse and lynching from some whites, and they were unable to fully exercise their right to vote (Branch, 1998).

In the 1960's, the College Board began a commitment to teacher training. As we look at teacher training for Advanced Placement classes and teacher expectations of black students, this area is a concern. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) referred to the culturally relevant pedagogy in her article. Culturally relevant pedagogy was a term coined by Geneva Gay (2002). She suggested that despite many attempts at school reform, teachers' beliefs often remain unchanged, particularly toward African American children and their intellectual potential (p. 478).

*Teacher training/Teacher expectations.* In order to increase equality in advanced classes, one area on which to place focus is in teacher recommendations. Teacher referral is a strong predictor of eligibility for special services. These services include Special Education or Gifted Education. Fordham and Ogbu (1986), wrote about how black students did poorly as a result of White Americans not acknowledging that Black Americans are capable of intellectual achievement and as a result: Black Americans begin to doubt their own intellectual ability, begin to define academic success as white people's prerogative, and begin to discourage their peers, perhaps unconsciously from emulating white people in academic striving. Rothstein (2013) believed, "Teachers of disadvantaged students are poorly trained, have low expectations, and fail to exert their best efforts" (p. 8).

In the primary grades, the teacher plays a major role in identifying students for accelerated programs. He/she has the ability to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of each student. As early as kindergarten, a teacher begins to mentally place students in groups based on ability. Are teachers expecting black students to do well? Many teachers believe that they can judge ahead of time, sometimes by just a glance the first day of school, how certain students are likely, over time, to achieve and behave (Tauber, 1998). According to Marshall and Oliva (2010), beliefs and assumptions of school leaders impact the achievement of students. When teachers expect students to do well and show intellectual growth, they do (Rhem, 1999).

A teacher's expectations will impact their willingness to see the potential of a student. Are these beliefs or expectations a part of teachers before they begin teaching? Or does a teacher develop beliefs or expectations through their experiences with students? Many teachers have low expectations, misconceptions, and false assumptions about students of color and poor

students. These assumptions hinder the learning of these students and threaten their academic experiences (Smith, 2005).

Everyone knows that the politically correct thing to say in Montgomery County is ‘every child can learn.’ The difference is between those who know the party line and those who believe it. I would say that about one-third believe it in action, one-third isn’t sure, and another third don’t believe it. (Childress, Doyle, & Thomas, 2009, p. 112)

This statement is powerful. “Montgomery County” can be substituted with various counties which is why it is a challenge for leaders to address beliefs and expectations in order to make improvements in their system.

How do personnel considerations and issues affect black students’ low representation in Advanced Placement classes? Most states use Teacher Referrals/Nominations, Parent nominations, and Self Nominations for students to participate in advanced classes (Ford, 1998).

#### Teacher Referral/Nominations

1. 86% of teachers are white (Darling-Hammond, 1995)
2. Lack of teacher training- “Several studies indicate that teachers are less effective and less accurate than parents in recognizing students who require gifted (Advanced) classes” (Ford, 1995, p. 9).
3. Teacher training, 61% of teachers surveyed received no training (Ford, 1995).

Teacher training impacts the identification process in Advanced Placement classes. Are teachers knowledgeable in the identification of gifted students? A study showed that 61% of elementary school teachers reported never having any training in teaching gifted students (Culcross, 1997). The well behaved, straight “A” student is an obvious choice for a gifted program. Teachers may overlook a minority student who is a “C” student with behavior

problems. Teachers' attitudes towards black students influence fewer referrals. The focus on deficits makes the recognition of strengths difficult for minority students (Frasier, Garcia, & Passow, 1995). Schools need more professional development on identifying and teaching gifted and talented students. Teachers who teach Advanced Placement classes should be required to take classes to develop their craft in the area of gifted education. A policy change may have to occur on the state level. In Texas and Florida, the state provides funding for teachers to attend summer college courses to help teach AP courses. As a result, Hispanic students have found higher participation in AP courses and more success on AP exams (Newman, 2011). The academy should educate pre-service teachers on how to identify students of color for Advanced Placement classes. Although a teacher's input is very important, I am interested in the criteria used for identifying students for the classes. The role of the teacher is very critical in identifying minorities for Advanced Placement classes.

In 1970's-1980's many schools added AP courses to their offerings. In the 1980's-1990's, nearly thirty years after the program was created the College Board reached out to students of color and students living in poverty for AP classes. During those years, there was little discussion about cultural relevance. Therefore, how did districts support the paradigm shift? Pre-AP Initiatives and AP Vertical Teams were instituted to help students gain knowledge and skills beginning in middle school. In 2003, a study by Third International Mathematics and Science (TIMSS) showed that AP students who received 3,4, or 5 on AP exams in Physics and Calculus outperformed other physics and advanced math students from both the United States and abroad. In 2011 changes are made in the AP curriculum focusing on bigger concepts and stimulating analytical thinking (College Entrance Examination Board, 2003).

Currently, the AP program is designed to prepare high school students for college by offering 37 college level courses, followed by an exam at the end of the course. The AP exams are scored on a 1-5 scale with 1 being the lowest. Students generally need a 3 or higher to pass the exam. If the student passes the exam, he or she may be granted college credit and be excused for the class (Collegeboard, 2014).

Advanced Placement programs have grown since being introduced over fifty years ago. In 1995, about 1,200 students took the AP exams. In 2000, 845,000 students took exams in 19 subject areas. In 2006, over one million students took over two million Advanced Placement examinations. Also in 2006, fifteen thousand schools participated in the AP programs and offered an average of eight different AP courses. Today, there are over thirty AP courses available for students (Collegeboard, 2012). The class is free. Yet, there is a fee for students to take the Advancement Placement examination. As of 2013, the cost was \$89 per exam. Financial aid is available for students who qualify. AP exams are scored from 1 to 5: 5-Extremely Well Qualified, 4-Well Qualified, 3-Qualified, 2-Possibly Qualified, 1-No Recommendation. Some colleges use the AP exam to exempt students from introductory coursework. Each college or university is different, but most schools require a score of a 3 or a 4 for college credit (Collegeboard, 2014).

**Benefits of Advanced Placement Classes.** There are benefits for taking Advanced Placement classes and when Black students miss out on these opportunities, they are disadvantaged. Research shows that taking Advanced Placement classes has positive results for college admission and attendance as well as economic benefits (Santoli, 2002). AP classes develop college-ready students. The level of rigor required is also needed in college. Also,



successfully completing an AP class is a good indicator for success in college as well (Collegeboard, 2014).

If a student tests well on an AP exam, he or she may be able to test out of certain classes in college. Students in AP classes may be able to choose a major sooner due to their introduction to a college preparatory class (Ndura, Robinson, & Ochs, 2003). They may also choose a major due to the success they found in an Advanced Placement class (Collegeboard, 2014). According to Russell Rumberger (2013), poverty and dropout rates are inextricably connected in the three primary settings affecting healthy child and adolescent development: families, schools, and communities. He also reported poverty rates for Black families three times the rates for White families. Therefore, the importance of AP classes for black students is also essential to assist in decreasing the dropout rate.

In addition, students also gain confidence from being in an advanced course. They learn time management and organization due to level of rigor and quick pace in an AP class. Many students enjoy having smaller classes when taking AP classes. The challenging work and friendly competition between students is also a benefit. In my opinion, there are also benefits in the community if more students of color are taking Advanced Placement classes. As mentioned above, students will be more prepared for college (Collegeboard, 2014). As a result, students may be more willing to attend college.

Other benefits of advanced placement classes may include an improvement in student achievement and a decrease in Special Education referrals and discipline problems. While we see an underrepresentation of students of color in AP classes, we see an overrepresentation of black students in special education programs. In the 2004-05 school year in Norwalk, Connecticut,

blacks students make up more than 36 percent of the special education population, yet the student body was 25 percent black (Salzman, 2005). In the area of Special Education, black students are often overrepresented in Special Education classes and underrepresented in Gifted and Talented programs. According to the report, “Truth in Labeling: Disproportionally in Special Education”:

With the exception of Asian/Pacific Islanders, CLD (culturally and linguistically diverse) students, particularly those from low economic backgrounds, are significantly underrepresented in programs for gifted and/or talented. The majority of students participating in gifted and talented programs across the country are White.

Conversely, the U.S. Department of Education (2006) reported that black students are: Labeled emotionally disturbed almost twice the rate of their white peers, over twice as likely to receive special education services for serious emotional disturbance as other CLD groups, three times as likely to receive services for mental retardation as white students and impacted by in resources, class size, overrepresentation in Special Education classes, and high stakes testing. By making an effort to increase minorities in higher level classes, we will possibly decrease the special education number. Student achievement may improve by increasing the number of black students in Advanced Placement classes. The rigor in the classes will lead to better test scores and more students prepared for post-secondary programs. A reduction of discipline problems may also decrease due to the involvement of more minority students in AP classes. In the Los Angeles and San Francisco Unified School Districts, white students are over represented in Advanced Placement classes and gifted programs and underrepresented in expulsions and suspensions. On the other hand, Latino and African American students have higher rates of dropouts and discipline problems (Keleher & Johnson, 2001).

In the order to the address the achievement gap and the opportunity gap one must begin alleviating the barriers leading to the underrepresentation of Black students in Advanced Placement classes. As mentioned above, there have been historically barriers with testing and how black people have been viewed regarding their intelligence. In Chapter 3, Mason High is introduced as representative case of other high schools in the country in that it too has an underrepresentation of Black students in the Advanced Placement classes. Also social theories are discussed as potential root causes leading to the problem of practice.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Theoretical Look at the Problem**

Mason High will be introduced as a case study. Also in this chapter, social theories leading to this problem are described. Social theories are frameworks from empirical evidence used to study other social issues. A parameter for the Dissertation in Practice is for it to be focused by a lens of social justice (ProDEL, 2012). I will use narratives from my local context as examples of the social theories I introduce.

### **The Problem in Context**

**Mason High School.** At \*Mason High School, black students are underrepresented in Advanced Placement classes.

\*Mason High School is a pseudo name which represents an urban high school with 68.57% of the students receiving free or reduced lunch.

In 2011, there were 538 black students and 630 white students at Mason High School. Below, you will see the demographics based on free and reduced lunch status of the entire Mason School District.

**Table 2: Mason School District Data**

## Active Students

	Free	Reduced	Paid	Total	Free & Reduced	Denied	Direct Certified
O'Neal MS	572	45	195	812	75.99%	16	499
Northeast Intermediate	233	16	177	366	68.03%	5	207
Northeast Primary	272	16	96	384	75%	6	248
Mason High School	691	42	366	1069	68.57%	12	573
Mason Intermediate	361	17	54	432	87.50%	3	317
Mason Primary	410	20	48	478	89.96%	4	350
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>2539</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>846</b>	<b>3541</b>	<b>76.11%</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>2194</b>

**Table 3: Mason High School Demographics**

The AP Demographical Information

2012-2013

Mason High School Demographics

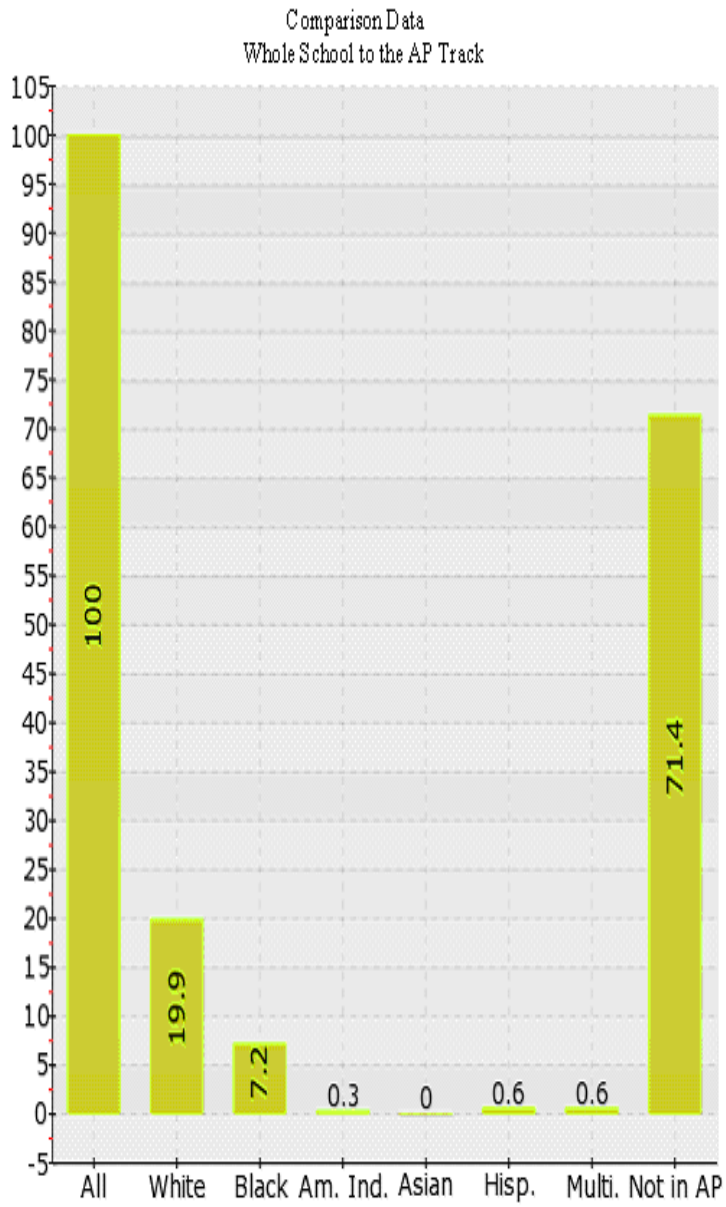
Group	Number of Students in Mason High School	Percentage
All Students	1132	100%
White	588	52%
Black	499	44.1%
American Indian	6	.5%
Asian	0	0%
Hispanic	17	1.5%
Multi-racial	22	1.9%

**Table 4: Students Participating in AP at Mason High School 2012-2013**

Comparison Data  
Whole School to AP Track  
2012-2013

Group	Number of Students in the AP Track	Percentage
All Students	1132	100%
White	225	19.9%
Black	81	7.2%
American Indian	4	.3%
Asian	0	0%
Hispanic	7	.7%
Multi-racial	7	.7%
Students not in AP Track	809	71.4%

**Figure 6: Comparison Data**





**Test Data at Mason High School.** Standardized tests at Mason High School indicated lower scores from black students compared to white students. Recent strategies for improvement include identifying the “bubble students,” tutoring for low achieving students, and aligning the curriculum. The “bubble students” are students who typically score basic, considered the middle level, on standardized tests. They are identified by teachers and given extra attention. These students are overwhelmingly black and males. In school and after school tutoring is offered for the “bubble students.” Recently, there has been a tremendous amount of work completed by teachers to align the curriculum. The purpose is to make sure all teachers are teaching the same information and completing the necessary material for the students to move to the next class. The emphasis has been on the lower achieving black students. Unfortunately, the school has not considered encouraging the “bubble students” to enroll in Advanced Placement classes as a strategy.

The Advanced Placement classes do not reflect the makeup of the school. In my experience as an administrator I became concerned with this problem. When entering classrooms, one immediately knew it was an Advanced Placement class due to the population. I wanted to know if the lack of diversity in these classrooms was a concern to the teachers. Were they satisfied teaching classes with a majority of white students in a school with many black students? This definitely sparked my interest in this topic. I walked into an AP English class and out of 18 students; there were two black students. Later, I observed an AP science class with 15 students; there were three black students. Two of the students were from the AP English class I observed earlier. The instruction in these AP classes was phenomenal. Students were engaged in rigorous activities and teachers were instructing on a higher level. I wondered if there was ever an effort made to involve more black students in these classes.

**Advanced Placement Policy at Mason High School.** Currently, students have the option of taking an AP class when scheduling for the following school year. The student must then have their current teacher in that content area sign off on the scheduling choice. For example, AP English 9 teacher must sign for the AP English 10 choice of a student. Teachers make their decisions based on current grades and ability. In the course selection book, each AP class has grade prerequisites. At times, a teacher may recommend a student who doesn't necessarily have the needed grade but who believe they are capable of completing the class. A parent may also request their child placed in an AP class. Their request is usually granted unless it's in a math class because students need the necessary skills to move to the next math class. Therefore, teachers and parents have great power when placing students in AP classes.

**A Closer look at the Current Policy.** An important part of addressing the issue involves learning more about the policies:

In the current AP policy at Mason High:

1. Students register for their classes in the spring for the following school year.
2. Their current teachers must sign off before the selections are given to the guidance counselors.
3. Students must meet certain grade requirements to enroll in an Advanced Placement class.
4. Once the selections are placed in the accounting system, some of the Advanced Placement teachers assign summer assignments and readings for their students.
5. Once the new school year begins, students have 10 days to drop a class.
6. Students are permitted to drop classes through their guidance counselor without parent permission.

7. AP classes are weighted differently than other classes. The highest score in an AP class is 110%.

## **Social Theories**

**Expectancy Value Theory.** This theory suggests that individuals' expectancies for success and the value they have for succeeding are important determinants of their motivation to perform different achievement tasks (Wigfield, 1994). Ogbu (1994) claimed that Black students may not be given access to advanced classes because teachers and principals may see them as inferior to their white peers. This treatment is shown through several practices including tracking students into low level classes, inappropriate assessments, and insensitive or unrepresentative portrayals in textbooks. According to the expectancy-value theory, students' beliefs concerning the degree they are confident in accomplishing an academic task (self-efficacy) and the degree to which they believe that the academic task is worth pursuing (Alexander, Wigfield, & Eccles, 2000).

In Mason High School, the black students have to value Advanced Placement classes. They need to understand why it would be wise to participate in the courses. The benefits have to be explained in a way that is appealing to a high school student. Also, they need to feel they can be successful in the class. If they feel they will not be successful, chances are they will choose not to enroll. In my conversations with students about the problem of underrepresentation of black students in advanced placement classes, students would often say:

“Why would I take an AP class and get a “C” when I could take a regular class and get an “A.” These students did not see the value of the class. They also did not think they could be successful in the Advanced Placement class.

There are two kinds of expectations gaps (Quaglia, Fox, & Corso, 2010). The first is the differing expectations that teachers hold for individual students. The second involves the difference between students' expectations of themselves and what they perceive of teachers' opinion of their potential. There are several areas of concerns when identifying students of color for Advanced Placement classes. According to Principal Sam Giangardella from Cholla High School, the expectations of students, teachers, and the community need to be raised. "Maybe the kids' expectations and the community's expectations weren't high enough." I'd hear people say, "I just want them to get through high school" (Gassen, 2003).

The Pygmalion Effect and Self-Fulfilling Prophecy are also theories focused on expectations. Harvard professor, Robert Rosenthal, studied teachers' expectations for students which led to the Pygmalion Effect. The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy was first coined by sociologist Robert K. Merton. The following five-step model explains how the SFP works: (Tauber, 1998).

1. The teacher forms expectations.
2. Based upon these expectations, the teacher acts in a differential manner.
3. The teacher's treatment tells each student (loud and clear) what behavior and what achievement the teacher expects.
4. If this treatment is consistent, it will tend to shape the student's behavior and achievement.
5. With time, the student's behavior and achievement will conform more and more closely to that expected of him or her.

Rosenthal described his frustration when knowing how powerfully teacher expectation affects student performance. "If teachers have high expectations, their students will be more motivated to succeed. Likewise, if teachers have low expectations, their students will have less motivation to succeed" (Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008, p.168).

*Aaliyah's Narrative.* Aaliyah is sophomore at Mason High School. She is a black student. I always thought she was very bright and tried to encourage her to push herself through the years. She is a student who would settle for a "B" if it meant less effort is required. As a ninth grader, her teacher is amazed by her natural intelligence. Learning seemed to come very easy. Therefore, she encourages her to take an AP English class in tenth grade. At the end of ninth grade, Aaliyah is in a fight which caused her to miss the first eight days of school. Upon arriving to school, she was overwhelmed with make up work. She comes to me and this is our conversation:

Aaliyah-I really need you to get me out of that woman's class.

TW-Aaliyah, you are totally capable of completing the work in that class.

Aaliyah-I know I can do the work. I just don't want to. And, I don't like her.

TW- Okay. Well, I am not allowing you to drop the class. You are too smart for that.

Aaliyah- Alright. Well, if I get a bad grade, I am blaming it on you.

After several months, the situation spiraled out of control. I truly believe the teacher wanted Aaliyah to do well. She talks to me about her progress and asks for suggestions. She tries several strategies. She continuously is amazed by Aaliyah's ability to think critically and write thoughtfully. Yet, she also thinks Aaliyah is purposely "sabotaging" herself. At the end of the school year, my conversation with Aaliyah did not go well. She storms in the office and this is our talk:

Aaliyah- WHY DID YOU MAKE ME STAY IN THERE?!

She began to cry and shake her leg.

TW- I am sorry, but I really felt you would do well.

Aaliyah-Well I have a “F.” And there’s nothing I can do. Thanks. I told you this would happen. I feel horrible for putting Aaliyah in this situation. Nothing positive came out of it. What could have changed this situation? I think Aaliyah’s expectations for herself were huge factors in this situation. She did not expect to do well, and she did not.

**Institutional Racism.** It is defined as differential access to the goods, services, and opportunities of society by race. It is normative, sometimes legalized, and often manifests as inherited disadvantage (Jones, 2000). There is an inequality and it appears to be based on the race of students. The definition also says “that the net effect of imposing oppressive or otherwise negative conditions against identifiable groups on the basis of race or ethnicity.” If this is the case, then minority students were already at a disadvantage. Possible contributors to this disparity, includes early biological and environmental influences and inequities in opportunities for preschool and K-12 education, as well as the possibilities of bias in the referral and assessment system that leads to placement in special programs (National Research Council, 2002). “Most people think of racism as intentional and overt acts between individuals. But the most profound forms of racism are institutional rather than interpersonal. Institutional racism is frequently subtle, unintentional and invisible, but always potent” (Keleher & Johnson, 2001, p. 24). In this system, teachers may not realize how their feelings towards black students are making them reluctant to recommend them to AP classes. There was an assumption that the students of color did not know the answer to the difficult questions. It was a racism that was “embedded in many teachers’ belief systems” (Landsman, 2004). Keleher and Johnson also discuss the complex and cumulative factors with institutional racism such as black students having access to high quality curriculum materials and advanced courses. Also, state laws and

local school policies have the effect of disadvantaging certain local groups. Recently, Governor Tom Corbett's budget has impacted some of the neediest districts in Pennsylvania through furloughs and programs being cut (Niederberger, 2011). These needy schools typically have large percentages of poor, students of color in attendance as well. In turn, they are affected by the decisions of lawmakers.

Many teachers do not feel the black students are capable of taking the Advanced Placement classes. Therefore, they do not recommend the Black students for the classes. The majority of U.S. teachers (80% to 90%) are White (Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005, p. 26). Their biases and assumptions may contribute to the problem. This lack of understanding of different cultures is worsened by the fact that the cultural make-up of the teaching staff is often far different from that of the student body. Also, the system for recruiting and retaining Black students in advanced classes may be infiltrated by racism. Perhaps, the system is intentionally or unintentionally set up to keep Black students out of the advanced classes. In my opinion, tracking could occur as a result of institutional racism.

Tracking is a potential result of institutional racism. If a system is set up to keep black students out of advanced classes, it will keep them in tracks. While looking at the problem from a historical view, we need to know when the particular problem began. When does this problem begin? In my opinion, it begins in Elementary school with tracking. As mentioned above, intelligence tests were used to separate Black and White students which led to the Black students being placed in lower tracks. According to Kao and Thomson (2003),

Students are stratified within schools according to ability groups or "tracks." Numerous studies have shown poor children and racial and ethnic minorities are disproportionately

placed in low-ability groups early in their educational careers and in non-college-bound groupings in junior high and high school. (p. 423)

Due to the tracking, there is a negative effect on the achievement of lower track students. Students in the lower tracks develop negative attitudes toward learning (Hallinan, 1988). On the other hand, students in the higher college prep classes: had positive attitudes toward learning, had educational aspirations, obtain higher grades, and are more likely to complete college, have lower rates for truancy and misconduct (Ansalone, 2001). A case study performed in North Carolina interviewed several school employees about the Advanced Placement Opportunity Gap. Several participants were very clear that, “the educational trajectory, early tracking, was responsible for the lack of African American students in AP courses” (Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008, p. 175). Black students were affected by their early educational experiences in elementary and middle school. They were placed in remedial, average, or gifted programs early on without further assessments. In high school, the lack of exposure and preparation in advanced classes in elementary school and middle school led to students’ lack of confidence to higher level classes in high school (Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008). Historically, students were put in tracks to segregate the black students from the white students (Valencia & Suzuki, 2001).

One teacher interviewed in the case study stated: “People don’t use the word tracking anymore; they say it doesn’t exist, but it does. And if these kids aren’t pushed to achieve, to move up that scale, they’ll just stay where they are” (Taliaferro and DeCuir-Gunby, 2008, p. 175). Tracking or ability grouping is the practice of sorting students in classes or courses based on their perceived ability. The “father” of gifted programs, Lewis Terman, believed in tracking students. His purpose was to separate students based on intellect through the use of tests. There



are many opposing views on the topic of tracking. On one hand, some believe that tracking causes segregation and students in lower tracks become self-fulfilling prophecies. Many advocates supporting the idea of rejecting ability groups in schools argue that grouping children by their ability contributes to segregation and classifies them into socioeconomic classes. Typically, black, Latino, Native American, and low income students are twice as more likely to be in remedial math courses than white or upper income children, according to a study done by Jomills Braddock in 1988 (Wheelock, 1994). Dr. James Johnson, an educational researcher, reported that the potential for problems generated by ability grouping far outweighs the scant benefits to be gained by rigid grouping (Reed, 1995). He believed that low ability groups become dumping ground for learners with discipline problems, some whom are not of low ability" (Reed, 1995). The children placed in the lower tracks tend not to be exposed to the same opportunities than other children are exposed to and therefore become bored more easily and often. "Bored with the repetitious and meaningless nature of such learning, students with the weakest basic skills who are placed in the low tracks are those most vulnerable to dropping out of school" ( Smith-Maddox & Wheelock, 1995, p. 223). A study showed that "tracking in high schools shows the system of placing some students in college preparatory courses and others in easier math and science courses is "harming millions of students in American society" (Stanford, 1994).

On the other hand, students in gifted classes often benefit from being in tracks with students who have similar abilities. Advocates for allowing tracking believe that students benefit when they are with peers with similar interests and abilities. They think it would be valuable to place students in classes based on common interests as long as those who are not in the gifted or "higher tracks" are not labeled as failures (Lima, 1996).

In the Mason Area School District, does tracking begin in the lower grades? If so, does it have a negative effect on black students? If so, it would explain the underrepresentation of students of color in AP classes. The tracks can be in “high reading” classes or “high math” classes in elementary school. The tracks can also be based on groups of friends requesting the same teachers for their children year after year. These tracks continue into middle school with the “advanced team” or the group taking Pre Algebra vs. Algebra. Later, the tracking spills over into high school leading to the problem of the underrepresentation of black students in Advanced Placement classes.

*Sadia’s Narrative.* Sadia is a junior at Mason High School. She is a black student. As a freshman, she was not recommended for AP classes by her eighth grade teacher. Her ninth grade English teacher thinks she is capable of taking an AP class in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. She proves this by providing her the AP work to do although she is in a regular English class. Sadia’s confidence is boosted and she enters an AP class in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. She is successful and her ninth grade teacher checks on her progress. In 11<sup>th</sup> grade, Sadia decides not to take AP English due to her busy schedule. In the summer, she begins having second thoughts. She speaks to her principal and asks for advice. Her principal suggests she emails the 11<sup>th</sup> grade teacher and asks for permission to take the class. Sadia is nervous and feels behind because she did not complete the summer reading. Finally, she writes the teacher an email and requests entry into the class. Because of the tone of the email, Sadia does not feel comfortable taking the class. The principal goes to the teacher on Sadia’s behalf. “Surprisingly,” she is “given permission” to take the class. Unfortunately, Sadia feels unwelcomed in the class during entire school year. She believes the teacher is angry because she did not originally sign up for the class. She earns a “C” in the end and did not request an AP English class for 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

What could have changed this situation? I believe the teacher's role in this narrative was very important. The system created by the teacher did not allow Sadia to be successful or accepted in an Advanced Placement class.

**Acting White.** Fordham and Ogbu (1986), list attitudes and behaviors of a student who was acting white. They include speaking Standard English, getting good grades in school, being on time, working hard to get good grades, and spending a lot of time in the library. In order to cope with the burden of acting white, students of color would maintain a low profile, put the brakes on academic performance, pretend not to have to work hard, and camouflage their ability from other students.

I believe that being in an Advanced Placement class is thought of as acting white at several urban high schools. Many believe that their peers are acting white if they talk or dress a certain way, speak properly, or obtain good grades. The black students are also concerned with their "image" in an AP class. They do not want to be considered a "nerd" or "geek." "They don't want to sell out because they think being intelligent is some way of being White" (Gassen, 2003). It is much easier to not participate in a more challenging class rather than be named as someone who acts white. Peer pressure is a huge issue for high school students. As a result, students often choose to stay out of advanced classes to avoid being treated differently by their peers. If students do not perceive any winning scenarios from taking Honors/AP classes, then they will not run the risk of losing their identity for that class. "The desire to have friends and to be popular, as well as to avoid alienation, isolation, and rejection," (Ford, Grantham, and Whiting, 2008, p. 223) may be key in their decision to avoid advanced classes.

**Stereotype threat.** Claude Steele (1999) defines stereotype threat as the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype or the fear of doing something which will confirm the stereotype. He believed that this barrier holds back the achievement of Blacks, women, and other underrepresented groups. Black students may be racially stereotyped by their teachers. “Blacks have been sometimes seen in the popular media of television, film, and print as “dumb,” “lazy,” or “dirty” (Solorzano, 1997, p. 9). These stereotypic traits can be used to justify:

1. Having low educational expectations for students of color
2. Placing students of color in separate schools or classes
3. Remediate the curriculum for students of color
4. Maintain segregated communities and facilities for students of color
5. Expect students of color to one day occupy certain types of jobs (1997)

Claude Steele (1999) argues that a “stereotype threat” also contributes to the disparities. He argues that group stereotypes threaten how students evaluate themselves, which then affects academic identity and intellect performance. Black students face the threat of being judged by a societal stereotype. The self-threat interferes with a student’s ability to actualize their best academic capacities. It stands to reason that student’ abilities on standardized tests or willingness to take an advanced placement are hampered by fear of being unsuccessful. Some experts say that the stereotype threat are an explanation for why black students are reluctant to take advanced classes and why their average scores are lower than their peers. While other researchers contributed culture mismatches, the nature of the curriculum, pedagogy practices of teachers and teachers’ belief systems as to why the gap persists.

Yvette Jackson (2011) speaks about the pressure that teachers are under due to high stakes tests, curriculum, and policies leading to fear. The fear inhibits many teachers from trying to motivate and support the learning of their culturally different students which is an example of stereotyping. As a result, the students feel the apprehension of the teachers and translate this as the teachers not caring or believing in their potential. Many of the students respond by shutting down and disrupting the class.

When looking at the expectations of students, black students may be negatively stereotyped by their white teachers. Thus, they may not be encouraged to partake in advanced classes. Sadly, the students probably do not realize that these stereotypes exist and are causing them to struggle in their educational experience.

*The narrative of Jane and Amy.* Jane and Amy are black, ninth grade students at Mason High. Jamie has a 92% average in her Social Studies class. Amy has a 90% average in Social Studies class. Each girl wants to take AP Science in 10<sup>th</sup> grade when registering in February. It is now March and their current Social Studies teacher says she is removing Jamie and Amy from their 10<sup>th</sup> grade schedule due to behavior problems. According to the teacher, Amy has a “smart mouth” and doesn’t deserve to be in an AP class. Jamie is “sneaky” and her teacher “doesn’t want to be embarrassed” by the 10<sup>th</sup> grade teacher if she starts acting up. Yet, according to the course selection book, each student meets the requirements necessary to take the AP class. They were racially stereotyped and their teacher did not expect them to do well in an AP class.

**Deficit Perspective.** This theory exists whereby students of color who are culturally different from their white counterparts are viewed as culturally deprived or disadvantaged. It keeps educators from recognizing the gifts and talents of blacks. Black students often have

certain characteristics such as: verve, mobility, oral tradition, communalism, spirituality, and affect. Yet, these characteristics are often misunderstood by white educators and interpreted as hyperactivity, immaturity, irrationality, low cognitive ability, and social dependency (Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Trotman, 2002).

At Mason High School, are the unique gifts and talents of black students valued? Or are they misunderstood? I often hear teachers complain about the attitudes that black teenage girls have. Unfortunately, the same girls are never considered: outspoken, independent, or confident. These stereotypes and expectations may lead to the underrepresentation of black students in Advanced Placement classes. Are black students seen as potential leaders or potential dropouts (Landsman, 2004)?

At Mason High School, there are many black students who are examples of the social theories described above.

**Student A.** Devon is a student at Mason High School. Devon is raised in a single parent household. He has two brothers murdered in the community of Mason. In the classroom, Devon is an average student. He is well behaved and typically would not ask for assistance from his teachers. Devon is extremely talented in athletics. He plays basketball in college and received a degree from the same university. Yet, Devon never enrolls in an Advanced Placement course. Due to the expectancy value theory, he is not expected to be successful in an accelerated class. I would guess that his teachers do not urge Devon either. Devon does not feel he would be successful in an advanced class. He also does not see the value of it.

**Student B.** Shawna is a senior at Mason High School. Shawna is raised in a single parent household. Her mother lives a life where she depended on public housing and food

stamps. Shawna's older sister is her role model. Her older sister lives a life very similar to their mother. Shawna matriculated from one year to the next under the radar. She does not participate in any school related activities and she does not have many friends. During her senior year, Shawna begins to struggle. She misses several days of school and her grades started to plummet. When asked, Shawna does not think she is able to graduate. Shawna does not graduate with her peers. She feels like her future is going to be like her mother and her sister. Therefore, she is not motivated to graduate. Through the years, Shawna does not take any Advanced Placement courses. Due to the stereotype threat, Shawna is probably not encouraged to take the classes. Shawna also struggles with a self-fulfilling prophecy.

**Student C.** Jada is a student at Mason High School. Jada is raised by her mother in a housing project in Mason. Jada's mother struggles with substance abuse. When I met Jada, I was instantly drawn to her personality. She is very popular and she travels the halls of Mason High School with an entourage. Jada and her friends are known for being loud and disruptive by their teachers. I always thought that Jada had leadership ability. Jada becomes frustrated because her teachers think she is rude, loud, and smart mouthed. In her sophomore year, she wanted to take AP classes. Her teachers did not recommend her. They said her attitude was not appropriate. Due to the deficit perspective, many of the teachers have Jada labeled as problem child. In contrast, I was impressed with Jada's coping skills knowing that she was dealing with a mother with substance abuse issues. I was amazed with her independence and mother instincts as she raised her younger brother when mom was not capable. Therefore, I looked at Jada's test scores and report card grades. She definitely met the necessary requirements. Jada was enrolled in the Advanced Placement courses and did well.

I have encountered each of these social theories, personally as a student and professionally as a student, teacher, and administrator.

**Personal Narrative.** As a student, I attended schools similar to Mason High School. My parents had high expectations for me. They did not accept grades lower than B's. Because of these high expectations, I was motivated to work hard and be the best student. My teachers had the same expectations for me. I can remember my teachers challenging and encouraging me by saying, "You are going to be something great one day."; "You are totally capable of figuring out this problem." This is an example of the Expectancy Value Theory because I worked hard because I knew my parents and teachers expected me to do well in school. I excelled in high reading groups, high math groups, and advanced classes in elementary and middle school. In high school, I succumbed to peer pressure and decided to no longer take advanced classes. This was because my friends would tease me and say I "acted white." Intentionally, I began to earn lower grades. As I reflect on those years, I am left wondering how I slipped through the cracks regarding the advanced placement experience. I fit the description of the cookie cutter high achieving high school student. Yet, I was not encouraged to take Advanced Placement classes.

As a teacher and administrator, I have noticed teachers acting as the gatekeepers of the Advanced Placement classes. I mentioned being the "cookie cutter" image of the high achieving student. By that I mean, I was smart, polite, well behaved, well spoken, and very actively involved in the school culture. Yet, I have encountered many gifted and talented black students who do not have any of the qualities just listed which is an example of Deficit Perspective. Teachers do not see the potential in students who are culturally different. Unfortunately, their teachers will more than likely not recommend them for Advanced Placement classes due to their



biases and beliefs. As an ethical and instructional leader, I must create opportunities for this problem to be explored in order to inform teachers and assist students.

These are just a few of the potential social theories (expectancy value theory, institutional racism, acting white, stereotype threat, and deficit perspective) which may cause an underrepresentation of Black students in Advanced Placement classes. Now, I will propose a method to begin finding small solutions. In the next chapter, a case study looks closely at Mason High where efforts were made through a grant to intentionally address the problem of practice by implementing a Networked Improvement Community.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Design for Action**

#### **Ways of Addressing the Problem**

The nature of this agenda is to examine the phenomenon of underrepresented Black students in one high school's Honors/AP program. The purpose of this agenda is to use a Networked Improvement Community to determine why the black students at Mason High School are choosing not to enroll in advanced classes. It is a suggested way to improve a system where the problem exists. The work explained in this chapter was done not at a policy level but as an effort to learn in and through practice.

**Networked improvement communities.** Networked Improvement Communities (NICs) are the frameworks school administrators can use to create a change in the school. An example of a NIC would be a forum to begin discussing the problem can be designed to improve the situation. They will create a networked improvement community. A Networked Improvement Community is a “distinct network that arranges human and technical resources so that the community is capable of “getting better at getting better” (Bryk, Gomez, & Gunrow, 2010, p.6; Englebart, 2003).

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (hereafter will be referred to as the Carnegie Foundation) initiated a prototype NIC to address failure rates of students in developmental mathematics in community colleges (Bryk, Gomez, & Gunrow, 2010). After careful analysis of the problem, it was revealed that there were sub-problems within the community college system. The effort designed Carnegie Stratway Network which created a one-year to and through statistics. The first participants in the Stratway Network are nineteen community college teams comprised of three faculty members, an institutional researcher and an

academic dean or vice-president. Each member of the team has a different focus. The network formed an information area to inform continuous improvement.

***The Six Core Principles.*** Anthony Bryk (2014) offered the six core principles for Networked Improvement Communities:

1. Make the work problem-specific and user centered
2. Variation in performance is the core problem to address
3. See the System that produces the current outcomes
4. We cannot improve at scale what we cannot measure
5. Anchor practice improvement in disciplined inquiry
6. Accelerate improvements through networked communities

Chapter 5 will further discuss The Six Cores Principles for Networked Improvement Communities as a tool to address the problem moving forward.

**The Local Response.** In the 2012-2013 school year, I decided to create a networked improvement community as an opportunity to learn and to begin looking at the problem of the underrepresentation of Black students in Advanced Placement classes at Mason High School.

The networked improvement community began by addressing the problem with a small group of individuals interested in the problem. It can initiate the conversation by asking themselves three improvement questions: (Bryk, Gomez, & Gunrow, 2010)

1. What problem are we trying to solve?
2. Whose expertise is needed to solve these problems?
3. What are the social arrangements that will enable this to work?

***Whose expertise is needed to solve the problem?*** I wanted to begin with one department in the school. I began with the Advanced Placement teachers and the chairperson of the

department. I chose this group because it consisted of diverse group that has many years of experience. The group also had a male teacher, it was enlightening to have a male perspective in profession consisting of mostly females. The diversity and years of experience was important because we were able to look at the problem from a historical view. In this group, we had over 50 years of teaching experience. Two of the teachers taught middle school at one point. I thought this was another key feature because this problem clearly was evident before high school. The chairperson was another person important for the community. She analyzed data on a regular basis and was familiar with the district data. I spoke with members of the group individually. Each member of the group agreed that this was a problem and was willing to work toward improvements. The members of the group networked the community with the Cultural Awareness Committee<sup>2</sup> (a sub-group of the Mason School Board), faculty at a local university, colleagues at neighboring school districts, community members, students, parents, and students. The Cultural Awareness Committee provided the NIC with an opportunity to address the policy. Faculty at the local university was needed to speak to parents and students about how Advanced Placement classes prepared students for college and its relevance on a high school transcript. Colleagues at neighboring school districts were able to offer ideas and suggestions about how they addressed the problem. Community members were able to offer supports, such as tutoring, for the students. Parents were able to explain their concerns and lack of knowledge about the Advanced Placement process. Students were able to give the most valuable information. They

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<sup>2</sup> The Cultural Awareness Committee is a pseudo name.

candidly spoke about why they did not take Advanced Placement classes. If they were enrolled, they were able to address their concerns.

***What problem are we trying to solve?*** During the school day, the Networked Improvement Community would meet to discuss the problem. At our initial meeting, I gave the group a brief description of my personal narrative and why I began to study this problem. I spoke about how I did not like being in advanced classes as a child because there were not many people who looked like me. I also discussed how I was becoming frustrated with the number of black students I was seeing in Advanced Placement classes when I walk from one classroom to the next. Finally, I shared national and local data. The idea of improvement science was also introduced to the group. They were told about my desire to improve a situation and not find a solution. Table 9 is a snapshot of the discussion generated during the first meeting.

**Table 5: Assessing the Problem**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Answers</b>
<p>Do you think that there is an underrepresentation of black students in your Advanced Placement classes?</p> <p>Why do you think this occurs?</p>	<p>Yes-The response was unanimous.</p> <p>The students felt the work was too hard.</p> <p>The students did not want to do the summer work.</p> <p>The students did not have parental support.</p> <p>The parents were not familiar with the Advanced Placement process.</p> <p>The students did not have their friends in the classes.</p>

In our next meeting, we divided our reasons into sections. They were parents and students. I asked the teachers if they believed “teachers” were a part of the problem. They were unsure and I offered these thoughts:

1. Teachers recommend students for Advanced Placement classes.
2. A student cannot register for an Advanced Placement class without a teacher’s signature.
3. Students may not like a particular Advanced Placement teacher and decide not to take their class.

After a brief discussion, the Networked Improvement decided to add teachers to their list. The final list was divided into three parts: Students, Teachers, and Parents. As the facilitator of the discussion, I wondered how this discussion would be different if the stakeholders were parents or students. Would they be able to see themselves as potential contributors to the problem? What reasons would they list? Hopefully, as the committee is networked, this question would be answered.

***What are the social arrangements that will enable this work?*** “Networks enable individuals from many different contexts to participate according to their interests and expertise while sustaining collective attention on progress toward common goals” (Bryk, Gomez, and Grunow, 2010, p. 6). A Teacher Empowerment group is an example of a social arrangement.

*Teacher Engagement Grant.* The teachers involved in the Networked Improvement Community received a grant from The Henderson Endowments<sup>3</sup>. The Education Program at the

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<sup>3</sup> Henderson Endowments is a pseudo name.

Henderson Endowments seeks to achieve equity in education for African American students and those living in poverty throughout Allenville County<sup>4</sup> via three strategic priorities:

1. Elimination policy and structural barriers to equity
2. Advancing effective teaching
3. Empowering youth as education reformers

In response to the inequities, the Teacher Engagement Grant (TEG)<sup>5</sup> was proposed. This will be a seed grant for middle and high school teachers to implement innovative projects designed to address educational disparities rooted in social injustices. The Allenville Intermediate Union<sup>6</sup> and Duncantown University<sup>7</sup> will collaborate to facilitate the TEG. As part of the grant, teachers will participate in an intensive workshop addressing: An Introduction to Social Justice, Equity vs. Equality, World Views and Beliefs, Advocacy in Education, Inequity in Education, and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.

The participants will also participate in monthly modules to offer support and facilitate teacher development in the following areas: Race and Privilege, Equity-based School Culture, Advocacy and Activism, The Poverty Context, Community and Collaboration, Racial Awareness and Creating Anti-Racist Leaders, Social Justice and Empowerment, and Barriers of Culturally Relevant Environment.

**Engaging stakeholders.** The TEG decided to have a community meeting for one of their initial events. Potential AP students and their families were invited to attend an informative

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<sup>4</sup> Allenville County is a pseudo name.

<sup>5</sup> Teacher Engagement Grant is a pseudo name.

<sup>6</sup> Allenville Intermediate Union is a pseudo name.

<sup>7</sup> Duncantown University is a pseudo name.



event. The students were asked based on grades, attendance, standardized test scores, and teacher recommendations. The stakeholders were: members of the NIC/TEG, representatives from the academy, a college freshman, students currently enrolled in Advanced Placement classes, Advanced Placement teachers, members of the Mason administrative team, invitees and their families. Students and parents received a meal and were able to obtain door prizes. Students and parents were given information about the current problem of underrepresentation of Black students in Advanced Placement classes. Also, the TEG (Teacher Engagement Grant) was introduced.

**Table 6: Discussion with Students and Parents at a Community Meeting**

<p>Students were asked why they do not currently take AP classes. Their responses were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-The work is too hard.</li><li>-I don't think I am smart enough</li><li>-I don't like the kids in those classes.</li><li>-My teacher would not allow me to enroll.</li></ul>
<p>Parents were asked why their kids do not take AP classes. Their responses were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-I never see my child's schedule.</li><li>-I did not know the process of getting my child enrolled.</li><li>-There are conflicts with the other classes they schedule.</li><li>-I did not know anything about the AP classes at Mason High School.</li></ul>

The representative from the academy spoke about how important it is for high school students to take Advanced Placement classes from the view of a college admissions specialist. The college freshman spoke about how her Advanced Placement classes prepared her for her first year in college. Members of the TEG described the next steps they were going to take through the grant.

The team made several policy changes such as not allowing students to drop a class without a parent's signature. This is to discourage students from dropping a class after seeing the workload. Also, free tutoring will be provided for students in Advanced Placement classes from a local university. The group also had town hall meetings with potential 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grade Advanced Placement students. Also, through the work of the team, a diversity club was created for high school students. Members of the club recruit other Black students for

Advanced Placement classes. They also act as mentors for 8<sup>th</sup> grade students and discuss expectations for high school with them. They attend community meetings to prepare for the future. Next, the team will collaborate with a local university to provide tutoring for students participating in Advanced Placement classes. The work of the TEG has caught the attention of the school district's Cultural Awareness Committee (a sub-committee of the Mason School Board). As a result, the TEG will be included in the Cultural Awareness Committee's strategic plan.

In the final chapter, I will focus on how this work will continue. I will end with a strategic plan which can be used by other schools, academies, or communities facing similar problems.

## Chapter 5

### Generative Impacts

**Ways of Addressing the Problem Going Forward.** As mentioned in the prior section, a Networked Improvement Community is a “distinct network that arranges human and technical resources so that the community is capable of “getting better at getting better” (Englebart, 2003). In order to continue the work, I am suggesting the Six Core Principles for Networked Improvement Communities (Bryk, 2014). Also in this chapter, I offer potential designs for networking the communities with other stakeholders and a strategic plan which can be used by other systems.

### Six Core Principles

**See the system that produces the current outcomes.** The Networked Improvement Community (NIC) must first look at the current system in order to gain profound knowledge as described in *The Improvement Guide* (Langley, Moen, Nolan, Nolan, Norman, & Provost, 2009):

#### 1. Appreciation for a system

A system is an interdependent group of items, people, or processes working together toward a common purpose (p. 77). The system is Mason High School. This includes the teachers, students, guidance counselors, parents, community members, school board members, representatives from the teacher’s union and administrators. Eventually it will be necessary to include elementary and middle school employees in the conversation as well, since the problem probably exists before high school due to tracking. It is imperative for all members of the system to work together to create improvement. For an example, if the school board changes the policy in order to have an open enrollment for AP students, the principal must make changes in the course selection book in order to reflect this change. Also, if guidance counselors are not communicating with the parents about their child’s classes, there will be a breakdown in the

system. All parts of the system need to be appreciated and included. The system will also include the current policy for entrance in Advanced Placement classes.

## 2. Understanding variation

“Everything we observe or measure varies” (Langley, Moen, Nolan, Nolan, Norman, & Provost, 2009, p.79). We need to know the variation in order to make the appropriate improvements. For example, when looking at the data of black students taking AP classes, we would need to know if the number of AP classes being offered has changed. Is there a popular teacher no longer teaching a particular class? If you are looking at a standardized test scores to gain knowledge of students’ ability, it would be helpful to look at the child’s ability on previous tests. Maybe the student did not do well on the test due to unknown variables. Perhaps he or she does not do well on standardized tests. What role do teacher recommendations play in the process? How important are report card grades?

## 3. Building knowledge

In the context of improvement, a change is a prediction: if the change is made, improvement will result. The more knowledge one has about how the particular system under consideration functions or could function, the better the prediction and the greater the likelihood change will result improvement. Comparing predictions to results is a key source of learning (Langley, Moen, Nolan, Nolan, Norman, & Provost, 2009, p.81).

In order to begin making an improvement, a theory has to be stated. For example, Black students may not take AP classes because the summer assignment is too difficult. A test could be done eliminating the summer assignments to see if an improvement occurs. Perhaps, this test improves the situation in AP English classes but not in AP science classes. Therefore, a theory must be stated and another test is created. By doing this, members of the NIC are building

knowledge and testing theories. They must also be knowledgeable about the purpose and history of Advanced Placement classes. As mentioned above, the original goal was to bridge the gap between high school and college. Is this theory evident in Mason High?

#### 4. Human side of change

“Knowledge of the human side of change helps us understand how people as individuals, interact with each other and with a system. It helps us predict how people will react to a specific change and how to gain commitment. It helps us to understand the motivations of people and their behavior” (Langley, Moen, Nolan, Nolan, Norman, & Provost, 2009, p. 83). How will we recruit followers in order to begin improving the situation? In the high school system, there is a need for more than just the AP teachers to have a desire to see an improvement. More importantly, those who do not teach AP are valuable because they may see the potential in their black students and can encourage them to register for an AP class the following year. It is valuable to anticipate the motives and desires of the stakeholders before engaging them. For example, a school board member would probably have different motives and expectations than a teacher. What do we need to know about the human side of change? In the *Improvement Guide* (2009), there are several contributions discussed:

Differences in people mean that stakeholders have different motivations and aspirations. They also have different values and beliefs. A teacher may not see the value in students taking AP classes. Also, a school board member may not see a need to change the current policy unless it had impacted the educational experience of his family member. In order to begin an improvement community, the teachers recognize the differences in people.

Behavior is driven by motivation and observing a person’s behavior does not give us a true understanding of what is motivating a person. If a principal is not willing to have an open

enrollment for AP classes that does not mean that he does not want to improve the situation. Perhaps, he is not familiar with the particular policy and needs to see small areas of improvement before making such a huge decision. The NIC may discuss how a principal may see this problem as a minor dilemma compared to other problems that may exist in the system. Therefore, he or she may not show a sense of urgency when initially discussing the problem. Knowing why a person behaves in a certain way can help the improvement community “build a commitment to change,” (Langley, Moen, Nolan, Nolan, Norman, & Provost, 2009, p. 84).

Fundamental attribution error suggests that it is easier to blame people rather than looking at how the system is causing people to act the way they do. “The parents are not involved, that’s why Black students are dropping or not registering for AP classes.” I have heard this line time and time again. Yet, have we looked at why the parents are not involved? Stakeholders would need to look at the current system and develop changes in the system to have more parents engaged.

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation suggests that those who are motivated extrinsically enjoy bonuses and rewards. Intrinsically motivated people are satisfied with the activity itself and the personal fulfillment. The improvement community will find success by aligning their improvements opportunities with the beliefs and values of the people in the organization. “Leaders need to explain the *why* of the change in terms of the organization’s values,” (Langley, Moen, Nolan, Nolan, Norman, & Provost, 2009, p. 84).

Finally, attracting people to the change is what the improvement community wants for people to feel included and see the value and the benefits of the improvement. The value of the improvement may be different from one stakeholder to the next. Members of the NIC have to be careful not to quickly implement a new change or product without gaining a commitment from

the others in the organization. In the *Improvement Guide* (p. 85), this is further discussed through the work of Everett Rogers in his proposed five attributes to facilitate adoption:

1. Relative advantage of the change over other changes or the status quo (What is in it for me?)
2. Compatibility with current culture and values
3. Minimal complexity in explaining the change
4. Allowing people to try and test the new change
5. Opportunities for people to observe the success of the change for others

**Accelerate improvements through networked communities.** The Networked Improvement Community can begin by looking at the barriers which are causing inequities in Advanced Placement classes. Each barrier can be addressed separately by the NIC.

The community- The communication with families regarding the benefits of Advanced Placement classes, the process of students entering AP classes and support for the children once they are in the AP classes.

The teachers- Teachers are an essential part in helping students realize they are capable of taking an AP class. Courageous conversations (Singleton & Hays, 2005) must begin in order for perceptions and expectations to begin to be discussed. When we discuss expectations with teachers, it will be by using a courageous conversation model. “*Courageous conversation* is a strategy for breaking down racial tensions and raising racism as a topic of discussion that allows those who possess knowledge or particular topics to have the opportunity to share it, and those who do not have the knowledge to learn and grow from experience” (Singleton & Linton, p.19).

The authors offer the following steps:

1. Stay engaged
2. Expect to experience discomfort



3. Speak your truth
4. Expect and Accept lack of closure

The Policy- The AP policy may need to be approached by school board members. Perhaps, the policy may need to hold the school accountable if capable students are not being encouraged to take AP policies. Teachers can look at data such as the PSSA. Students, who performed well, should be approached to take AP classes. If they opt not to take the class, they must have a parent/guardian sign a form. Also, parents should have to sign a form if their child decides to drop the class.

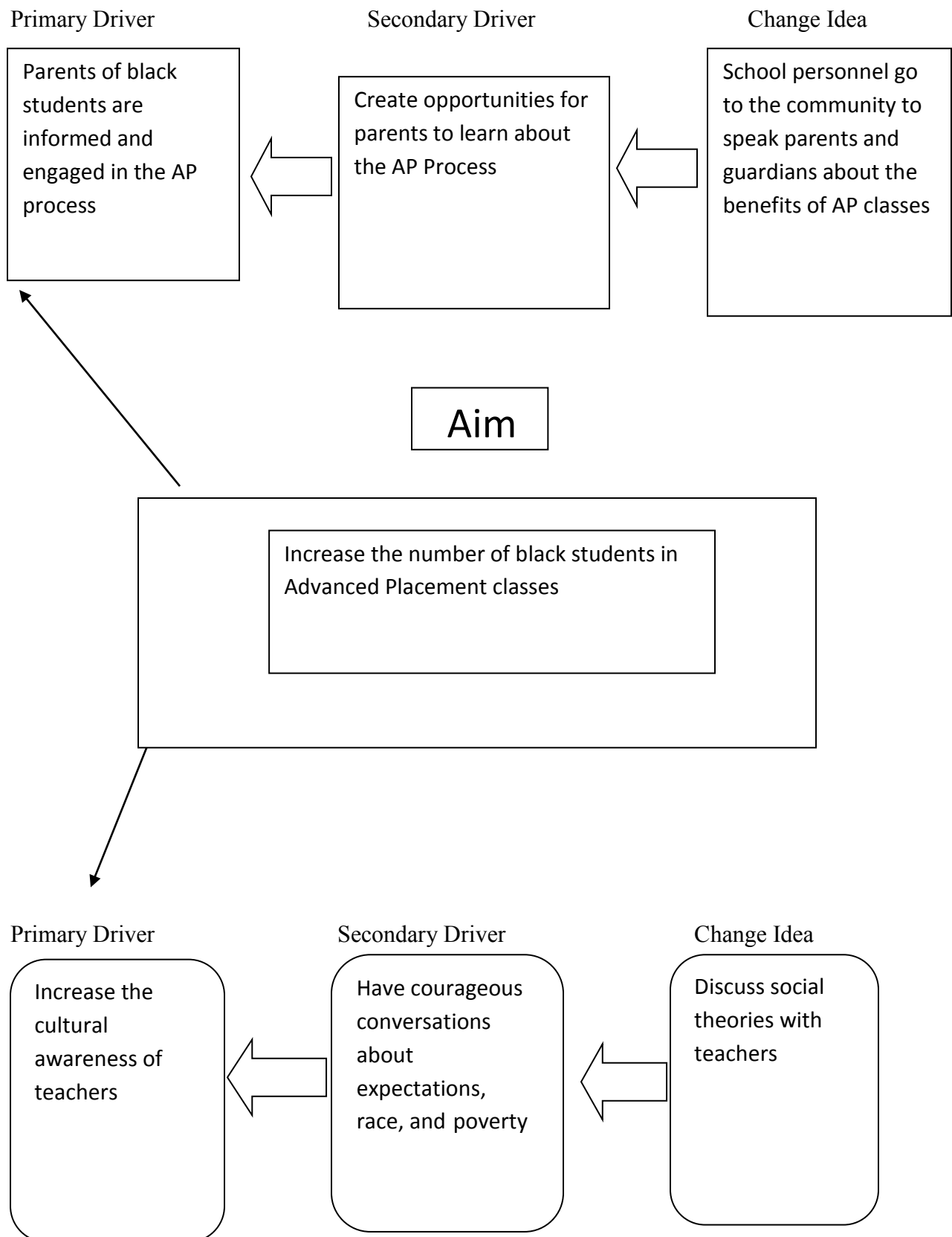
***Engaging stakeholders.*** After these steps are walked through by the Networked Improvement Community, they can engage stakeholders in order hear more voices to improve the situation. The stakeholders will connect the school, academy, and community. Stakeholders must be included for the improvement process. The stakeholders will include but not be limited to: students, teachers, community members (students, parents, churches, after school programs, diversity committee, and representatives from the teacher’s union, administrators, and members of the academy.) The stakeholders may begin looking at what changes may be needed in order to see improvement. They need to keep in mind the barriers which have been designated: Parental engagement, policy/school structure, teacher training/beliefs and expectations, and the context of the town. By addressing these elements, the improvement team will be challenging “what has always been done.” In the book, *Leading for Equity*, the authors addressed six key assumptions in which status quo were challenged:

1. Policy makers could not mandate change.
2. There must be an end to a culture of blame.

3. Quality of teaching makes all the difference. The workforce should strengthen itself and integrate research and practice into activities.
4. School quality discussions should focus on new factors: class size, student groupings, attitudes and expectations, dispute resolution, and family involvement.
5. It is up to the whole community to participate in the improvement.
6. The success or failure of an improvement strategy depends on what occurs in the classrooms. “Without buy in and support of an entire organization and people it serves (parents and children), change will not take place” (p. 25).

**Make the work problem specific and user centered.** The Networked Improvement Community can create a Driver Diagram and Road Maps (Langley, Moen, Nolan, Nolan, Norman, & Provost, 2009) to begin addressing expected results. They are integral tools of Improvement Science and is especially effective when solving complex problems at the practitioner level. A program improvement map encourages critical thinking about how complex systems operate “in tandem with one another” (Bryk, 2010, p. 15). Below are examples of Driver Diagrams and Road Maps for the problem:

**Figure 7: Driver Diagram**



**Table 7-Road Map**

<u>What the short term results are</u>	<u>What the medium term results are</u>	<u>What the ultimate impact is</u>
-Root causes are analyzed	-Communication between parents and teachers	-An awareness of expectations and how they affect students
-Communication between parents and teachers	-Policies changed in AP requirements	-A culture of communication between the school and community
-Parents become informed about the AP program and access	-Improvement groups are formed	-Professional development designed around the needs of the teachers and students
-Assumptions and expectations are discussed	-Goals and deadlines are set	-An increase of the number of Black students taking AP classes
-Current data is analyzed		-Black students more prepared for post secondary education due to their high school experiences

The Driver Diagrams and Roadmaps can produce the following results:

- Parents, guardians, and the community are informed about the AP Process.
- There are supports implemented to keep black students in AP classes (tutoring, mentoring, etc.)
- Policy changes are created by the school board.
- More Black students are taking AP classes.
- Teachers are having conversations about their perceptions and expectations.
- Teacher trainings about AP classes and recommending students from various backgrounds are offered to teachers.
- Improvement meetings with the school, academy, and community to discuss the problem and areas of improvement are continuous.
- Newsletters and flyers to keep the community informed.
- Mentors are placed in the school for black students.
- Policies are carried out to improve the situation.
- School leaders are looking at data and making teachers accountable. For example, if a particular student is showing he/she would be successful in an AP class, the teacher should be reaching out to the student.

**Variation in performance is the core problem to address.** Bryk (2014) suggests asking “what works, when, for whom and under what circumstances?” rather than “whether an intervention works.” When looking at the problem, there are some black students enrolling in Advanced Placement courses. Why are these students different? Also, some systems, which are similar to Mason, have been successful at addressing the problems. Those schools should be studied as well. Below is a summary of some of ideas from Montgomery County Public School. They experienced some of the same difficulties as Mason School District.

***Success in other school districts.*** In the Montgomery County Public School, it was once a policy that students required a teacher's recommendation to be considered for an AP or Honors class. The stakeholders were shocked to find that often teachers did not recommend qualified minority students for advanced courses. The policy was changed and students were able to choose whether or not to take advanced classes, if they met certain requirements, such as a minimum score on the PSAT. Because of this requirement, it was necessary to find strategies to increase minority participation on the PSAT. Principals and teachers met with family members about the importance of taking the PSAT. Some created a comfortable space for students taking the PSAT by providing food and drinks. Thirteen out of twenty-four high schools showed an increase of the number of minority students in PSAT participation and advanced classes. Yet, there was still resistance to place qualified minority students in advanced classes. Next, a team created a tool called the Honors/AP Potential Identification Tool (HAPIT). This was a way to show staff the research that these students had the aptitude for more rigorous classes. The tool had certain markers: ethnicity, PSAT scores, grades, past course enrollments, and performance on standardized tests. Finally, the deputy superintendent personally met with students who met the requirements and were not in any AP classes. By 2008, 88.1 percent of Blacks and 84.4 percent of Hispanic students took the PSAT. Currently, over 60 percent of Black and Hispanic students are enrolled in at least one AP or honors class.

***Anchor practice improvement in disciplined inquiry.*** The Plan-Do-Study-Act Cycle (Langley, Moen, Nolan, Nolan, Norman, & Provost, 2009, Shewart) an example of disciplined inquiry in which the problem can be studied moving forward.

**Table 8: Plan-Do-Study-Act (Bryk, Gomez, & Grunow, 2011)**

<u>Plan</u>	<u>Do</u>	<u>Study</u>	<u>Act</u>
<p>Plan-In this phase, the team will look at how they understand the problem. They will NOT discuss solutions. This is often difficult for educators due to their prior experiences. Educators can use a shared tool such as an improvement map or driver diagrams. The map or driver keeps all members on the same page and using the same language.</p> <p>The learning opportunity, test, or implementation was planned</p> <p>Look at root causes.</p>	<p>Do-In this phase, quick trials are created to show evidence. As a group, desired accomplishments and what changes will be introduced are discussed. The goal is to “try it quickly, learn from it cheaply, revise, and retry” (Bryk, Gomez, and Grunow, 2010, p. 26)</p> <p>The plan was attempted. Observations are made and recorded, including things not part of the plan.</p>	<p>Study-This is the phase when the team will know if the change is an improvement. What data do you have to prove the change occurred?</p> <p>Time was set aside to compare the data with the predictions and study the results.</p>	<p>Act-The idea of “test fast, fail fast, and early, learn improve” (Bryk, Gomez, &amp; Grunow, 2010, p. 28.) is found in this phase. Also, new questions may need answered in the Act Phase.</p> <p>The action was rationally based on what was learned.</p>

**We cannot improve at scale what we cannot measure.** There must be targets, measureable outcomes and timelines for addressing the problem. This will cause participants to work under the same understanding. The setting of targets helps the team to investigate goals. The targets must be valued and considered attainable by the NIC team. The targets must be realistic. In order to create realistic targets, the results must be public to the stakeholders. Also, there must be an agreement to use the results to process the targets (Bryk, Gomez, & Grunow, 2010). In turn, the team will wonder how others are finding success and become motivated to make the same improvements. For example, a measureable outcome could be to increase the number of Black students in Advanced Placement classes by 10%. Another target could be to have 4 informative parent meetings in a school year. In order to monitor potential Black students for Advanced Placement classes, I am suggesting the following tool:



**Table 9: Advanced Placement Monitoring Form**

Student's Name	Report Card Grade/Test Scores	Teacher Request	Parent Request	Special Gifts or Talents	Please list the steps taken to enroll the student into AP classes.

In this chapter ways to continue the work was described. Also, The Six Core Principles were suggested as a way to look at the current system and move the work forward. A strategic plan and possible designs to network the communities, end this chapter.

## **Strategic Plan**

After the grant is completed, a plan needs to be in place to continue the work. The Networked Improvement Committee can design a strategic plan. Below you will find an example of a potential plan based on learning which has occurred and part of my agenda to further the work.

### **Strategic Plan Strategy**

Explore research-proven strategies to recruit and retain Black students in Advanced Placement classes.

#### **The Beginning**

In the spring of 2013, a small group of teachers met to discuss a problem discovered by an assistant principal. The problem: There was an underrepresentation of black students in Advanced Placement classes in an urban high school. Based on the discussions, a Network Improvement Community was created. In the summer of 2013, the Networked Improvement Community attended a professional development through a grant. The Henderson Endowment offered the Teacher Engagement Grant (TEG). This seed grant for middle and high school teachers was designed to implement innovative projects created to address educational disparities rooted in social injustices. The Allenville Intermediate Unit and Duncantown University will collaborate to facilitate the TEG. After the trainings and discussions, the group decided to begin taking actions to begin addressing the problem. The group focused on the impact of students, parents, and teachers.

The Network Improvement Community conducted research on successful strategies for recruiting and retaining black students in Advanced Placement classes. The group also looked at the current data at the school.

## ***Research***

Durham Public Schools. April 22, 2011. Strategic Plan. Petition for Fulfillment Status.

### Planning and Implementation

Educational Testing Service. (2008). Access to Success: Patterns of Advanced Placement Participation in U.S. High Schools. Policy Evaluation and Research Center, Policy Information Center, and Educational Test Service (ETS)

Ford, D. Y. (2012). Ensuring Equity in Gifted Education: Suggestions for Change (Again), *Gifted Child Today* 35(74) Sage Publications.

Langley, G., Moen, R., Nolan, K., Nolan, T., Norman, C., & Provost, L. (2009) *The Improvement Guide*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

The Network Improvement Community met in the fall of 2013 to begin looking at the data.

They then used several variables (standardized test scores, report card grades) to identify students who were capable of participating in Advanced Placement classes. These students and parents were invited to an event focusing on the problem.

The Network Improvement Community also researched other schools and how they addressed the problem. For instance, the Durham Public Schools (2011) formed an AP Focus Group.

Some of the strategies included:

**Table 10: AP Focus Group (Durham Public Schools, 2011)**

Teacher Preparation	Summer institutes, Professional development opportunities, and Board policy to support the Professional development
Communication	Communication-Create AP Parent Night presentation kits for school district information sessions, Conduct school-based AP parent nights three times each school year, Create AP links for educating parents and students
Curriculum	Incorporate Pre-AP strategies at the middle and early high school levels, Counsel and mentor students, especially from underrepresented populations-regarding a good baseline for students and prepare them for AP coursework
Student Preparation	Create AP contracts with students to outline student/parent expectations, Revise board policy, Create and Conduct online AP classes
Monitoring	Create AP subcommittee as part of the AIG Steering Committee (Network Improvement Community), Monitor syllabi at the principal and district level (aligned with Teacher Evaluation Instrument), Monitor Professional Development for teachers with incorporates Standard 5-using current research

Research on the Problem. Author Donna Ford (2012) suggests the following recommendations and suggestions to address the persistent and pervasive underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students in gifted education.

1. Increase accountability- Educators and families blame each other for poor student performance and do not hold themselves accountable. Students are caught in the middle and all parties lose. Ford suggests honest self-appraisal on how educators and parents are failing Black and Hispanic students.
2. Adhere to gifted education philosophy- According to Ford, gifted education is often used to entice high-income families to public schools and prevent “White flight.” She suggests getting back to the basics of meeting the needs of gifted and high-potential students-to provide them with an appropriate, responsive, and equitable education.
3. Improve data analysis- Data should be used and analyzed in a meaningful and instructive way. According to Ford, inadequate teacher referrals, tests, and policies and procedures contribute greatly to segregation in gifted classes. She also feels that a formal evaluation of gifted education is needed in every school district, with data evaluated, annually.
4. Improve teacher cultural competence- The academy typically does not offer courses in gifted education or multicultural education. Therefore, most teachers are not prepared to work with culturally different, low-income, and gifted students. Ford believes that high qualified teachers should be placed with minority students to nurture and develop gifts and talents.
5. Professional development in schools must prepare teachers to be culturally competent- Professional development must be of the highest quality-ongoing, rigorous, and addresses real and tough issues.

6. Improve expectations- The data on expectations is overwhelming and consistent. High expectations improve referrals of Black and Hispanic students to gifted education classes and programs.
7. Increase teacher diversity- According to research, nationally only about 15% of teachers are non-white. A diverse school staff improves achievement and morale. School leaders need to make a concerted effort to diversify the teaching staff.
8. Collaborate with and reach out to uninformed families- Black and Hispanic families want their children to have the best education. They need the support of educators through communication with is valued and welcomed.
9. Provide mentoring- Students need advocates to help them through their educational journey. Effective mentors motivate and inspire Black and Hispanic students.
10. Promote a scholar identity among Black and Hispanic students- Black and Hispanic students can accept low expectations and negative stereotypes. Schools and families must advise and counsel Black and Hispanic students in ways that nurture their gifts and talents.

According to the report, “Access to Success: Patterns of Advanced Participation in U.S. High Schools,” the College Board has offered different programs to boost participation in Advanced Placement classes for non-White and non-Asian minorities. They were:

- AP Test Fee Program, in which students meeting the “financial need” criterion are given, discounted test fees.
- The Advanced Placement Test Fee Grant program and the Advanced Placement Incentive Program sanctioned by the U.S. Department of Education. The

recipients of these awards must meet eligibility requirements of serving students in schools where at least 40 percent of the study body is low income.

- States and local districts offer their own AP program strategies: test-fee reduction policies start up grants, teacher professional development, and incentives for student and teacher performance.



## Next steps

In order to network the communities, I am suggesting the following designs:

### *Possible designs of actions:*

As I begin to improve the situation in which the problem exists, I will explore potential designs:

1. ***Meeting with SAC-*** In my first year as a doctoral student, we began our work in Hazelwood. While being in the school group, we organized an event in which the school, academy, and community was able to communicate using guided questions. This model was effective because it was held in the community and also because all stakeholders were given opportunities to speak freely. It appeared that everyone was treated equally. Community members seemed comfortable talking to teachers and administrators. I believe this was because they were in their own community. A similar design in Mason would be productive. It could be held in one of the community centers held in the housing projects. Some of the invitees could be; parents, community members, teachers, a consultant, school board directors, and representatives from the academy. The invitees could be divided into small groups in which each member of SAC is representative.

Once in groups, the following questions could be used as topics of discussion?

1. What is the importance of students being in Advanced Placement classes?
2. What ways can we use to encourage students to take part in Advanced Placement classes?
3. What safety nets would be needed to ensure success in Advanced Placement classes?
4. Next Steps

After the table talk, representatives could give a report on what was discussed in each group. The question would be, “What was your ah ha moment?” More importantly, the group would decide on the next steps and next meeting date.

2. ***Meeting with school-*** Another possible design would need to take place in the school where this problem exists. It seems as the problem is inherited when the students enter ninth grade. The underrepresentation is noticeable when the students are recommended for Advanced Placement and/or Honors classes from their eighth grade teachers. Therefore, the ninth grade teachers need to begin identifying potential AP students who were not recommended by their teachers. Then a decision needs to be made whether or not they should move immediately or wait until 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Also, current AP teachers need to decide what supports they are offering to keep Black students in their classes. Finally, Black students who are currently in AP classes act as recruiters for the AP program. The following questions should be discussed in the meetings?

What can we do to encourage more Black students to take AP classes?

What supports can we offer for current Black students in AP classes?

What barriers are preventing Black students from taking AP classes (summer reading, requirements, and teacher recommendations)?

What are our next steps?

3. ***Another meeting in the school*** -Would address the expectations a teacher has for their students. This could be done with several courageous conversation activities throughout the school year. I would suggest using the book, *Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* (Ladson-Billings, 1994), as a guided reading source. This step is necessary before recommending students for AP classes. It will open the door for

being honest and using the book as a way to reflect on teaching strategies. Possible discussion questions:

What expectations do you have for all Black students? Do they differ depending on where a student lives or family history?

How can we make our classes more culturally relevant?

What can we intentionally do to make our AP classes more appealing for Black students?

What are our next steps?

4. ***Meeting with community stakeholders*** (local churches, afterschool programs, and community centers): One goal for meeting with the community stakeholders would be to provide safety nets for children in the AP classes. Many students opt out of AP classes due to the summer reading assignments. Local community groups could provide study sessions throughout the summer for students to work on their assignments. Teachers from the school district could work as tutors. The study sessions could also exist during the school year for students when they encounter difficult work. It would also work as a time for AP students to recruit and mentor other students. Another goal for the community would be to explain to parents the importance of AP classes and what is needed for their child to enroll. Also, parents of current AP students could discuss their experiences and encourage other parents to do the same with their children. Possible discussion questions:

1. How can we support our students who are taking AP classes?
2. Why is it important for my child to take an AP class?
3. How do I enroll my child in an AP class?
4. Next steps?

5. ***Meeting with the academy-*** Mason High School has several colleges and universities close by. Yet, there is very little interaction with the academy and the school district. A conversation with a representative from the Education Department at the academy and a representative would be beneficial. More students should be encouraged to take college level classes at the university while in high school. Students need to know what is required in a college class. An introduction to this type of work is in an AP class. Pre-service teachers at local colleges and universities need to learn about the Pygmalion Effect in their training. They can use Mason High School as a place of training to begin identifying students for AP classes. Topics of conversation?
1. How can we encourage more Black students to take a college level class?
  2. What needs to be taught to pre-service teachers about identifying Black students for AP classes?
  3. What can we do to strengthen the collaboration between the academy and Mason High School?
6. ***Looking at more data-*** As I continue to explore root causes, I am learning the problem exists before students enter high school. Students are placed in tracks as soon as elementary school with “high reading” and “high math” groups. Therefore, I have to decide if my potential design should only focus on AP classes in high school. Yes, it is where my problem of practice exists. Yet, I may find myself in a middle school or elementary school one day. Therefore, I may need to begin looking at designs for other schools as well.

## **Final Thoughts**

In conclusion, this is work is brief summary of a work which began and is still continuing at Mason High. As the leader, I engaged my colleagues in understanding the problem. By using Improvement Science, there were challenges in both the what and how of their normal practice. As mentioned, the normal practice is to find a quick solution rather than searching for the root causes. My colleagues overcame the normal approach and began to first understand the problem and see the system. Then, they began to design and develop ways of addressing the problem within the context of the system. The work continues at Mason High and here are areas in which my colleagues and I felt needed attention in the future:

1. Mentors- Being a mentor, I would continue to share my personal experiences as a black student with similar past experiences. Students will hopefully feel comfortable speaking to me because I walked the same halls and streets. Also, it is important to expose black students to role models in various professions.
2. Advocates- As a leader, I have tried to encourage students to advocate. Many black students do not have parents who challenge or question the system. Therefore, I try to teach skills for the students to advocate for themselves. For example, ask a teacher what they need to do to participate in an advanced class.
3. Exposure- In my opinion, black students need constant exposure to positive experiences in order to gain confidence. Schools and community groups can expose students to colleges/universities, museums, community service experiences, and traveling opportunities, etc.
4. Tough talks- I believe that engaging teachers in the “uncomfortable”, tough conversations about race and expectations should be a priority for leaders. Without this step, all of the other work will not be productive.

5. Networking- Finally, in order for the work to be generative, the communities have to be networked with other stakeholders. The list above includes a plethora of designs, but there are many more. This work can not be limited to a school, one community, or the academy. Yet, if they collaborate, more children can be afforded the same opportunities as their peers.

Mason High is an excellent example of the issues previously outlined in this dissertation. There is a risk in exploring this area of concern. When race is mentioned, many adults become uncomfortable, but as an educator I understand that I cannot address these issues without some risk. For example, I am taking a risk by exposing something that one may not see. I am willing to take the risk because black students and the overall school will benefit. One would ask why all classes aren't taught to the level of Advanced Placement class. There is also the risk of pointing out the obvious small numbers of black students in these classes. I am focusing on high school for this study.

As a matter of social justice, an effort to increase black students in AP classes needs to occur. Black students should have the same opportunities as their peers. It is their right to have an equal education (Cookson, 2011). Teachers need to be informed on ways to better identify students, build relationships with the students and communicate with the parents. Teachers need the opportunity to talk about what is really going on with their black students. Some schools have "courageous talks" where teachers can begin speaking about what goes on with their students outside of school and being educated on the whole student. Parents also need to be empowered as the first teacher of their child with information on identification and benefits of AP classes. Students need to be interviewed as the key stakeholders. Their opinions and recruitment skills will be the key for increasing the number of minorities. By educating teachers,

empowering parents, and questioning students; more Black students will be represented in Advanced Placement classes.

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## Appendix A

### The Voices of Intelligence

<b>Sir Francis Dalton</b>  (McLafferty, 2006)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-In the 1800's, he published his theory of intelligence.</li><li>-He believed that heredity determined intellect, placing Ancient Greeks as most intelligent with Africans on the bottom.</li><li>-He began the nature vs. nurture debate.</li></ul>
<b>Alfred Binet</b> <b>Theodore Simon</b>  (Nash, 1987)  (Santrock, 2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-In 1895, developed the first cognitively based intelligence test.</li></ul>
<b>Otto Klinberg</b>  (Valencia & Suzuki, 2001).	<p>He investigated the idea that African Americans are less intelligent than whites and disproved the hereditary theory. He noted that those who were familiar with the intelligence test had the advantage.</p>
<b>Lewis Terman</b>  (Boring, 1959)  (Ford, 1996)  (Valencia & Suzuki,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-In 1916, Lewis Terman, the “father” of the gifted education movement, publishes the Stanford-Binet, forever changing intelligence testing and the face of American education.</li><li>- Terman encouraged the idea of using intelligence tests for educational tracking and in the workforce.</li><li>- Lewis Terman made revisions to the test, normed it to American Society and renamed it the Stanford-Binet test. --- His sample size included 1,000 middle-class individuals who</li></ul>

2001)	<p>were of the Western European descent.</p> <p>In 1921, Lewis Terman was responsible for the longitudinal studies of giftedness. His original sample size had 1,500 gifted children. He used individuals from the Western European descent in his sample size. Also, he believed that heredity determined a person's intelligence.</p> <p>He thought that students who scored between 70 and 80 (average score of 100) represent the level of intelligence common for Native Americans, Mexicans, and African Americans. He suggested that these children should be segregated.</p> <p>Terman suggested students to be put into tracks based on their performance on a test. He wanted the Native Americans, Mexicans, and African Americans excluded from the more intelligent children.</p>
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## **Appendix B**

### **Executive Summaries**

Dear Members of the Mason Area School District School Board,

At Mason Area High School, black students are underrepresented in Advanced Placement classes. Currently, there are 131 white students and 41 Black students in Advanced Placement English class. This means there is three times as many white students than Black students in these classes. This does not reflect the overall number of students in the entire school. There are 538 black students and 630 white students. As part of the effort to close the achievement gap, educators should be encouraged to enroll more black students in Advanced Placement Classes.

Black students were overrepresented in lower level classes and underrepresented in advanced classes in our district. Are teachers expecting black students to do well? “Many teachers believe that they can judge ahead of time, sometimes by just a glance the first day of school, how certain students are likely, over time, to achieve and behave” (Tauber, 1998). “When teachers expect students to do well and show intellectual growth, they do” (Rhem, 1999).

I am encouraging more professional development sessions on gifted education. In my 11 years in the district, I have never been trained on identifying students for gifted and Advanced Placement classes. Yet, I have a certification in Gifted Education from Carlow University. How many of the current teachers have any training in this area? Yet, we put a lot of emphasis on lower achieving students. It is time to focus on our higher achieving students as well in order to take our district to the next level. As our motto says, “Every child, every day.”

Thank you for your time.

## **Appendix C**

Dear Members of Bethlehem Baptist Church,

At Mason Area High School, black students are underrepresented in Advanced Placement classes. Currently, there are 131 white students and 41 black students in Advanced Placement English class. This means there is three times as many white students than students of color in these classes. This does not reflect the overall number of students in the entire school. There are 538 black students and 630 white students. As part of the effort to close the achievement gap, educators should be encouraged to enroll more black students in Advanced Placement classes.

Do you know how many of your young members are currently enrolled in Advanced Placement classes? Do the parents know their ability to request their child's placement in an advanced class? Finally, do your members know the benefits of being in an Advanced Placement class? AP classes develop college-ready students. The level of rigor required is also needed in college. Also, successfully completing an AP class is a good indicator for success in college as well. If a student tests well on an AP exam, he or she may be able to test out of certain classes in college. Students in AP classes may be able to choose a major sooner due to their introduction to a college preparatory class. Students also gain confidence from being in an advanced course. They learn time management and organization due to level of rigor and quick pace in an AP Class. I would love to speak to the members of BBC about this area of concern. This church is an asset to the community of Mason. Therefore, the children should be treated as assets as well. Thank you for your time. God Bless!



## **Appendix D**

Dear Penn Taver University Education Department,

At Mason Area High School, Black students are underrepresented in Advanced Placement classes. Currently, there are 131 white students and 41 black students in Advanced Placement English class. This means there is three times as many white students than Black students in these classes. This does not reflect the overall number of students in the entire school. There are 538 black students and 630 white students. As part of the effort to close the achievement gap, educators should be encouraged to enroll more black students in Advanced Placement classes.

A study showed that 61% of elementary school teachers reported never having any training in teaching gifted students (Culcross, 1997). Does your university offer any training in teaching gifted students? I am concerned with the preparedness of teachers in identifying gifted and advanced students. Does your university offer training in urban education? I am also concerned with how teachers interact with students in an urban school. At times, they do not know how to identify their gifts and ability to be in an advanced class.

Our school district would love to partner with your university regarding these concerns. It would be a great experience for your pre service teachers to begin working with our high school students. They can begin learning how to identify gifted students by taking part in professional developments and real life training. With this partnership, your students will gain hands on training. Our school district will be able to aid in the development of well-rounded teachers. Please consider this endeavor.

Thank you for your time.